FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY

WHITE NIGHTS

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW

Ф. М. ДОСТОЕВСКИЙ

БЕЛЫЕ НОЧИ

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ
НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
МОСКВА

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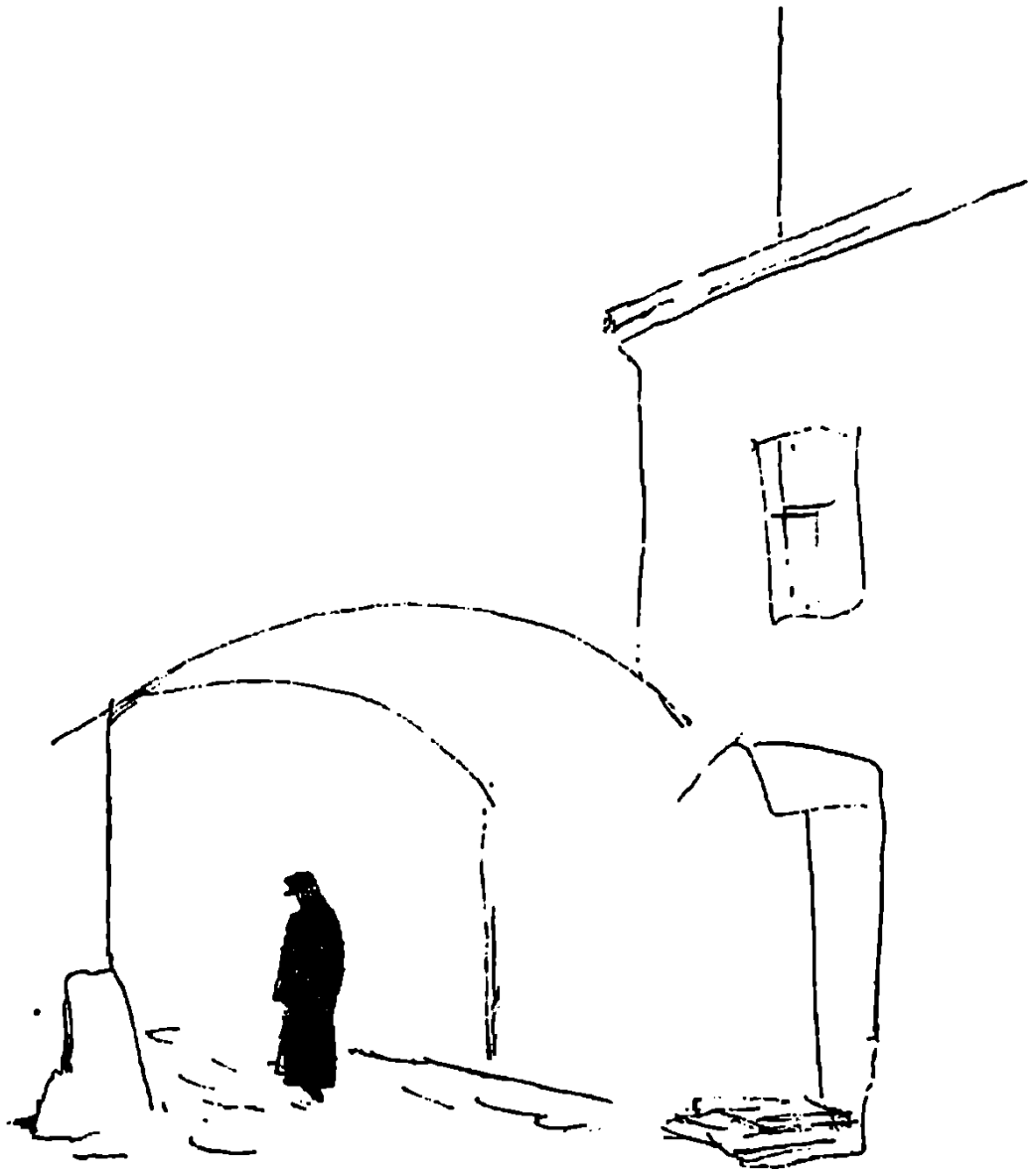
. . . Or was he born that he might dwell,
If only for a fleeting hour,
In the reflection of your love?

I. TURGENEV



WHITE NIGHTS

A Sentimental Novel

(From a Dreamer's Reminiscences)

FIRST NIGHT

It was a beautiful night, a night that we may only know when we are very young, dear reader. The sky was so starry, so clear

was the sky, that, looking at it, you could not help asking yourself: how can all sorts of cross and crotchety people live beneath a sky like this? That's a very youthful question, too, kind reader, very youthful indeed, but may it please the Lord to trouble your heart with such questions more often. Speaking of all sorts of cross and crotchety people, I cannot but recall my own exemplary behaviour all that day. Ever since the morning, I was prey to a peculiar melancholy. I suddenly fancied that everyone was forsaking me in my loneliness, that everyone was casting me off. It would only be fair to ask, of course: who was everyone? For I have been living in St. Petersburg for eight years and I have not managed to make any friends to speak of. But why should I make any friends? As it is, I am friends with the whole of St. Petersburg, and that was why, when all the town suddenly packed up and left for the country, I fancied that everyone was forsaking me. It frightened me to be left alone, and for three whole days I wandered up and down the streets in deep dejection, quite unable to understand what was the matter with me. I'd go to Nevsky Avenue or to the

park, or I'd ramble along the embankment, and wherever I went I missed seeing the people I was used to meeting at the same place and at the same hour for a whole year now. Of course, they don't know me, but I know them. I know them well, I have made an almost perfect study of their faces, I delight in them when they are gay, and grow melancholy when they are clouded. I almost made friends with one old man I had been encountering on the Fontanka every single day at the same hour. He had such a grave and pensive face; he kept whispering to himself, gesticulating with his left hand, while in his right he carried a long knotty walking-stick with a golden knob. He had noticed me, too, and took a sincere interest in me. I am sure he would have felt dispirited if he had failed to meet me at the same spot on the Fontanka at the same hour. This is why we practically greeted one another at times, especially when we were both in a happy frame of mind. The other day when we met after an interval of two whole days, we were actually on the point of raising our hats but, fortunately, we pulled ourselves up in time, dropped our hands,

and passed each other by with unspoken sympathy in our hearts.

I am friends with the houses too. When I walk down the street they all seem to rush towards me, and they almost speak, staring at me with all their windows: "How are you? I am very well too, another storey will be added to me in May!" or "How are you? I'm to go into repair tomorrow," or "I almost caught fire, and I was so frightened!" and so on. I have my favourites among them and my intimate friends. One of them intends to take a course of treatment at the architect's this summer. I shall make a point of coming here every day to see that it doesn't come to any harm, bless it. But I shall never forget what happened to one very pretty, pale pink little house. It was such a sweet little stone house, it smiled to me in such a friendly way and looked so haughtily at its clumsy neighbours that my heart rejoiced whenever I chanced to walk past it. All of a sudden, last week, as I was going down the street I heard a piteous cry: "They're painting me yellow!" I glanced at my friend. The brutes! the barbarians! They had spared nothing: neither the pillars nor the cornices, and my friend

had turned yellow like a canary. I almost had an attack of jaundice over it, and to this day I cannot bring myself to go and see my poor, disfigured friend, painted the colour of the Celestial Empire.

And so you see, dear reader, how I have become friends with the whole of St. Petersburg.

I have already mentioned that I was feeling depressed, and the mood persisted for three full days before I understood the cause of it. I felt ill at ease out-of-doors (that one was not there, this one was not to be seen, and what could have happened to so and so?), and at home I felt restless too. I cudgelled my brains for two nights in succession: what was amiss in my bit of a flat? Why was I finding it so uninviting? And I ran my puzzled eye over the green grimy walls, the ceiling hung with cobwebs, which Matryona allowed to gather so redundantly, I scanned all the furniture I had, examining every chair, thinking that here lay the root of the trouble perhaps, for if I see a single chair standing differently from where it had stood the day before, I grow restless; I gazed at the windows, but all to no avail ... it didn't relieve my mind at all! It even occurred

to me to summon Matryona and give her a fatherly scolding about the cobwebs and the untidiness generally, but she only looked at me in surprise, and left the room without a word, and so the cobwebs remain undisturbed to this day. And finally, only this morning, I understood what was the matter. Why, they were skipping from me into the country! Forgive me this trite expression, but I was beyond the choice of lofty words ... because everyone who had been in St. Petersburg was either going or had gone to the country; because in every respectable-looking gentleman hiring a carriage I instantly saw a sedate family man who, having finished with his daily work, was hurrying off to the country to join his family; because every man in the street had quite a peculiar look now, which all but said to every passer-by: "We are only here in passing, gentlemen, and in a couple of hours we shall be leaving town." If I saw a window pushed open—slim white fingers drumming on the pane first, and then a pretty girl thrusting out her head and calling a vendor of potted flowers—I instantly, there and then, imagined that those flowers were being bought not at all because the people wanted

to enjoy the spring and the flowers in a stuffy flat in town, but because very soon they would all be moving to the country and would be taking the flowers along. Moreover, I had already made such strides in my new and peculiar field of observation that I could tell unerringly, by outward appearances alone, where each one had his summer residence.

Those who came from the Kamenny and Aptekarsky islands, or from down Peterhof way, could be told apart by their studied gracefulness of manner, their fashionable summer clothes and the splendid carriages which brought them to town. Those from Pargolovo and places further afield instantly impressed one with their prudence and their reliability; an unruffled and gay look stamped the visitor to Krestovsky Island.

Whether I happened to meet a long procession of coachmen walking lazily, reins in hand, beside their dray-carts piled high with furniture of every description: tables, chairs, divans Turkish and otherwise, and other household possessions, with a puny-faced cook perched on the very top of the load, presiding over all this and guarding her master's belongings for all she was worth; or whether I

watched the boats, laden with furniture and utensils, gliding down the Neva or the Fontanka towards the Chornaya River or the islands—the carts and the boats increased tenfold, a hundredfold in my eyes. It seemed to me that everything had started up and taken to the road, everything was moving to the country in whole caravans, it seemed that St. Petersburg itself was threatened with becoming a desert. And then I felt ashamed, hurt and sad: there was absolutely no reason and no place for me to go to in the country. I was prepared to go with every cart, with every respectable-looking gentleman hiring a carriage; but no one, no one at all invited me; it was as if I were forgotten, as if I were indeed a stranger to them!

I walked so long and so far that I quite lost my bearings, which was usual with me, when suddenly I found myself at the town gate. All at once I felt gay, I passed the barrier and walked through the ploughed fields and meadows insensitive to weariness and only aware, with the whole of my being, that a weight was lifting from my heart. All those who drove past me threw such friendly glances at me, they all but greeted me, they

all seemed so glad of something, and every one of them was smoking a cigar. And I, too, felt glad as never before. It was as though I had suddenly found myself in Italy, so strong was my impact with Nature, half-sick townsman that I was, who had almost suffocated in the walled-in city.

There is something inexplicably touching in the country around St. Petersburg when, with the coming of spring, Nature suddenly displays all its might, all the strength which the heavens have endowed it with; when it dons its finery, decks itself out with foliage and bright flowers.... For some reason it reminds me of a sickly, consumptive young girl whom you regard with pity at times, with a compassionate sort of affection at others, and disregard altogether at others still, but who suddenly, for a single moment, assumes a wondrous beauty that is inexplicable and unexpected, and you, stunned and entranced, have to ask yourself: what force has made those sad, pensive eyes flash with such fire? What brought the colour to those pale, wan cheeks? What breathed passion into those delicate features? Why does her bosom heave so? What has so suddenly brought strength, life, and beauty

into the face of this poor girl, making it glow with a smile so radiant and light up with laughter so sparkling? You look about you, you search for a reason, and then you begin to understand.... But the moment is gone, and perhaps on the morrow you will again meet the same pensive and listless look, the same wan face, the same attitude of meekness and timidity, and even see repentance, or even traces of some moribund dejection and vexation for that one moment of inspiration.... And you feel sorry that the ephemeral flower of beauty has wilted so quickly, so irrevocably, that the flash has been so deceptive and in vain, you feel sorry because you have not even had the time to come to love it....

But say what you like, my night was better than my day! This is what happened.

It was very late when I got back to town, the clock had already struck ten when I was nearing my home. My route lay along the embankment of the canal, where you would hardly meet a soul at this hour of the night. It's true, of course, that I had my lodgings in the most remote part of the city. I walked and sang, for when I am happy I invariably hum a tune, like every happy man who has neither

friends nor acquaintances to share his happiness with. And suddenly, I had a most unexpected adventure.

A woman was standing close to the railing a little distance away from me; she was evidently staring absorbedly at the murky canal waters as she leaned against the grille. She was wearing a pretty yellow bonnet and a dainty little black cape. "She's a young lady and she is sure to be a brunette," I thought. Apparently she did not hear my footsteps, she never stirred as I walked past her with bated breath and loudly beating heart. "That's odd," thought I. "She must be deep in thought about something." And suddenly I froze to a standstill. I thought I heard muffled sobs. Yes, I was right. The girl was crying, and she sobbed again and again. Good Lord! My heart cringed. And shy as I was of women, I saw this as an exceptional moment.... I turned back, took a step towards her and would have certainly cried "Madam!" had I not been aware that this exclamation had already been uttered thousands of times in all the Russian novels of the beau monde. That stopped me. But whilst I searched my mind for a suitable opening, the girl's

sobs ceased, she looked about her, pulled herself together, dropped her eyes, and slipped past me along the embankment. I followed her at once, but she crossed the street when she heard me, and walked along the pavement on the other side. I lacked the courage to cross the street. My heart fluttered like a captured bird's. And then mere chance came to my rescue.

Suddenly I saw a gentleman in evening clothes, dignified in years but not in deportment, appear on the pavement close to the girl. He swayed as he walked, steadying himself by clutching at the wall. The girl hurried on, as fleet and light as an arrow, the way all young girls walk when they do not want the offer of an escort home at night. The swaying gentleman would never have caught up with her of course, had not the destiny that ruled my fate prompted him to resort to extreme measures. Suddenly, without a word, the gentleman leaped forward and tore off after the girl. She was swift as the wind, but the swaying gentleman was gaining on her, then he caught up with her, the girl cried out, and ... I bless my stars for the splendid knobby stick I happened to be carrying in my

right hand. In a flash I was on the other side of the street, in a flash the importunate gentleman realized what was afoot, resigned himself to the irresistible argument of the stick, fell back without a word, and only when we were very far away broke into protest against me in rather forceful terms. But we hardly caught his words.

"Give me your hand," I said to the young lady, "and he will not dare accost us again."

Silently she gave me her hand, which still trembled from fright and agitation. Oh, unknown gentleman! How I blessed you just then! I gave her a fleeting look: she was most sweet and a brunette—so I had surmised correctly! Her black eyelashes were still glistening with tears of recent fright or was it recent sorrow—I know not. But a radiant smile already touched her lips. She stole a glance at me too, blushed faintly, and looked down.

"Now you see, you shouldn't have shunned me earlier. Had I been there, nothing would have happened."

"But I did not know you, I thought you, too. . . ."

"And do you know me now?"

"A little. Now tell me, to begin with, why are you trembling?"

"Oh you have guessed it! You have guessed at once who you are dealing with!" I replied, delighted to find my young lady so clever: it gives an added advantage to beauty. "It is true that I am shy of women, I admit that I am agitated as much as you were a minute ago when that gentleman frightened you.... I feel somewhat frightened now. It's like a dream, and even in my dreams I never imagined that some day I would speak to a woman."

"No? Really?"

"Yes. If my hand trembles now it is because it has never yet been clasped by a hand as pretty and small as yours. I have become quite unused to women, or rather I have never been used to them. I'm quite alone, you know. I don't even know how to talk to them. At this very moment, too, I am not certain if I haven't said something silly to you. Tell me frankly, I assure you I shall not mind...."

"Oh no, no, on the contrary. But if you insist on my being frank with you, I shall tell you that shyness appeals to women; and if you wish to know more, then I'll tell you: it

appeals to me too, and I shall not send you away until we reach my house."

"You'll make me lose all my shyness instantly," I began, breathless with happiness. "And then—adieu to the only means that I possess!"

"Means? What means? Now that wasn't very nice of you."

"Forgive me, I won't say it again, it was just a slip of the tongue, but do you think it possible that at a moment like this I should have no wish to...."

"To be liked?"

"Well yes. Be kind to me, for heaven's sake be kind. Think what I am! Here I am, twenty-six years old, and I have never known anybody yet! So how could I speak well, cleverly, and smoothly? You'll find it better for you too, if everything is laid frankly before you. I cannot remain mute when my heart is clamouring within me. Oh well, never mind. Can you believe it, not one woman, never, never! Not a friend! All I do is dream that some day somewhere I shall meet someone. Ah, if you only knew how often I have been in love like that!"

"But how? With whom?"

"Oh, no one, just an ideal, with anyone I saw in my dreams. I make up whole romances in my dreams. Oh you do not know me! Of course, I have met two or three women, but what women were they? They were such good housekeepers that.... But I'll tell you something that will make you laugh. I have often thought of starting a casual conversation in the street with some lady of the aristocracy, if she were by herself, that is. I would speak to her timidly of course, with respect and feeling. I'd say that I was dying from loneliness, I'd beg her not to drive me away, I'd tell her that I had no way of getting to know any woman at all, I'd make her see that it was part of her calling as a woman to hear out the timid plea of a man as unhappy as I was. And that, after all, the only thing I was asking of her was to say two words of sisterly compassion to me, not to send me away at once, but to take me at my word, to listen to what I had to say, to laugh at me if it pleased her, but to give me some hope, speak two words to me, just two words, even if we were never to meet again! But I see you are smiling.... However, that's what I'm telling you all this for...."

"Don't be upset, I am only smiling because you are your own enemy, and because if you tried it, you would perhaps succeed, even if it did happen in the street; the simpler the better.... No woman with a kind heart, unless, of course, she was stupid or particularly angry at something just then, would dare send you away without speaking the two words which you so timidly entreated her to speak.... Oh but what am I saying! Of course she'd take you for a madman! I was judging by myself. Little do I know of the ways of people in this world!"

"Oh thank you!" I cried. "You cannot know what you have done for me!"

"Come, come! But tell me, how did you know I was the sort of woman who ... well, whom you considered worthy of your attention and friendship ... in short, not a housekeeper, as you put it. Why did you venture to come up to me?"

"Why? But you were alone, that gentleman was too bold, it's night; you will admit that it is one's duty...."

"No, no, before that, there on the other side of the street. You did want to come up to me then, didn't you?"

"There, on the other side? But I really don't know how to put it, I'm afraid ... d'you know, I was feeling happy today, I walked and sang. I'd been out of town, I had never experienced anything so pleasant before. You... but I may have just fancied it.... Forgive me if I bring it back to you: I fancied you were crying, and I ... and I could not bear it ... it wrung my heart.... O dear God! Surely I may be allowed to grieve for you! Surely it was not really sinful of me to feel a brotherly compassion for you? Forgive me, I said compassion.... Well, in a word, could I have offended you with my spontaneous wish to come up to you?"

"Enough, do not say more, enough," she said, pressing my hand. "It's my own fault, I brought it up myself. But I am glad I was not mistaken in you.... Well, here we are, I must turn into this alley, it's only a step or two. Good-bye and thank you."

"Can it, can it really mean that we shall never meet again? Is this all there is to be?"

"Now you see," the girl laughed, "all you wanted at first was two words, and now.... However, I shall not say anything. Perhaps we shall meet again."

"I'll be here tomorrow," I said, "forgive me, I see that I am being too persistent."

"Yes, you are impatient, you are almost too persistent."

"Pray listen, listen," I broke in. "Forgive me if I say something to you again that is not ... but this is how it is with me: I must come here tomorrow. I am a dreamer. I have so little actual life, moments like this come to me so rarely that I cannot but live through them again and again in my dreams. I shall dream of you the whole night through, I shall be dreaming of you for a whole week, a whole year. I shall certainly come here tomorrow, to this very spot, at this very hour, and I shall be happy recalling the day before. This spot is dear to me already. I have two or three such spots in Petersburg. Once my memories even made me weep, like you ... who can tell, perhaps you, too, were weeping for your memories a little while ago. But pray forgive me, I have forgotten myself again. Perhaps you were once very happy here."

"Very well," said the girl. "I think I'll come here tomorrow, at ten o'clock. I see that I cannot forbid you any longer. The point is

that I shall have to be here; do not think that I am making a rendezvous with you, I am warning you that I shall have to be here for my own reasons. There's only one thing . . . oh well, I'll tell you frankly: it will not matter if you come too. Firstly there might be some unpleasantness like there was tonight, but that's beside the point. In short, I should simply like to see you . . . to say two words to you. But you will not judge me severely now, will you? You won't think that I make rendezvous too freely? I wouldn't have made this one either, if only.... But let it remain my secret. However, on one condition."

"One condition! Tell me, speak to me, tell me now: I agree to any condition, I am prepared for anything," I cried, enraptured. "I shall answer for myself, I shall be obedient, respectful . . . you know me."

"It is only because I know you that I am inviting you tomorrow," the girl replied with a laugh. "I know you perfectly. But mind you come on condition that, firstly (and do be so kind and do what I am about to ask of you—you see how frank I am?), you do not fall in love with me.... You mustn't, I assure you. I am prepared to be your friend, here is my

hand ... but you must not fall in love with me, I beg you!"

"I swear!" I cried, grasping her hand.

"Come, do not swear. I know you are apt to flare up like gunpowder. Do not mind my saying so. If you only knew.... I too have no one to talk with, no one to advise me. Of course, the street is not the place to look for advisers, but you are an exception. I know you so well, it seems we have been friends for twenty years. You will not break your promise, will you?"

"You shall see ... but now I don't know how to survive the intervening hours."

"Sleep soundly, that's the way. Good-night, and remember that I already trust you. How well you said it that surely every feeling, even brotherly compassion, did not have to be accounted for! D'you know, it was so well said that it instantly occurred to me to put my trust in you."

"Good Lord, but how, what trust?"

"Until tomorrow. Let it remain a secret till then. So much the better for you, it will seem like a romance, if only in imagination. Maybe I'll tell you everything tomorrow, and maybe not. I shall talk more to you first, we'll come to know each other better."

"Oh yes! I shall tell you everything about myself tomorrow! But what is it? It's as if a miracle had happened to me ... where am I, dear God? Tell me, surely you cannot be displeased with yourself that you did not become angry, like anyone else would have done, and sent me away at the outset? Just two minutes, and you have made me happy for ever. Yes, happy! Who can tell, perhaps you have reconciled me to myself, dispelled my doubts. Perhaps I'm just given to spells like that. Oh well, I'll tell you everything tomorrow, you'll know everything, everything."

"Very well, so be it. You will be the one to begin."

"If you wish."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

We parted. I walked all night long, I could not bring myself to go home, I was so happy ... till tomorrow!

SECOND NIGHT

"You see, you have survived!" she said to me, laughing and taking both my hands in hers.

"I've been here for two hours; you

can't imagine what this day has been like for me!"

"I can, I can ... but let's get to the point. Do you know why I'm here? I didn't come here to chat about trifles the way we did last night, you know. Now then: we must act more sensibly in future. I kept thinking about all this for a long time last night."

"But in what way must we be more sensible? For my part I am willing, but truly this is the most sensible thing that ever happened to me in my life!"

"Really? First of all I must ask you not to crush my hands so, and secondly I want you to know that I have pondered about you for a long time today."

"Well, and what is the verdict?"

"The verdict is that we should begin all over again, because this morning I came to the conclusion that I hardly knew you at all, that last night I behaved like a child, like a silly girl, and it naturally followed that the fault lay in my kind heart, in other words I ended up by praising myself the way one always does when one begins to analyze one's actions. And so, to correct my fault, I have decided to find out everything I could about

you to the smallest detail. But since there's no one I could ask, you must tell me everything yourself, all your secrets. Now, what sort of person are you? Hurry and answer me, tell me the story of your life."

"My story?" I cried in alarm. "My story! But who could have told you I had a story? I have no story."

"How did you live then if you have no story?" she interrupted me with a laugh.

"There's no story to my life at all! I have simply lived a life apart, entirely alone that is—alone, quite alone—do you know what it means—alone?"

"But how—alone? D'you mean you've never even seen anyone?"

"Oh no, I do see people occasionally, but nevertheless I am alone."

"Don't you ever talk to anyone?"

"In the strict sense of the word—no."

"But what sort of a person are you, do explain! Wait a minute, I think I know: you probably have a grandmother like I do. She's blind and it's ages since I've been allowed to go anywhere, and so I've almost lost the habit of conversation. And once, two years ago, I did something naughty and then

she saw there was no holding me, so she called me to her and pinned my dress to hers with a safety pin—and that's the way we've been sitting pinned together day after day, ever since then. She sits and knits a sock, blind though she is, and I've got to stay beside her, sewing or reading aloud to her. It's such an odd custom, pinning down someone for two whole years."

"Good heavens! What a misfortune! But no, I have no grandmother at all."

"But if you haven't, what makes you stay at home?"

"Look here, do you want to know who I am?"

"Of course I do."

"In the strict sense?"

"In the strictest!"

"Very well. I am an individual."

"An individual? What sort of individual?" the girl exclaimed and burst out laughing so merrily one might have thought she had not had a chance to laugh for a whole year. "Why, you're most amusing! Look, there's a bench over there, let's sit down. No one ever comes here, no one will hear us, and begin on your story now, because you do have

one, whatever you may say, you're just making a secret of it. First of all, what does 'individual' mean?"

"An individual? An individual is an eccentric, a funny sort of man," I replied, joining in her child-like laughter. "It's a character one has. Listen, do you know what a dreamer is?"

"A dreamer? Goodness, who doesn't? I'm a dreamer myself! When I sit beside Grandmama, the things that come into my head sometimes! And then I start weaving dreams, and they carry me so far away I almost see myself marrying a Chinese prince! You know, it's good to be a dreamer sometimes. But no, perhaps it isn't, I don't know, especially if you have something else to think about," the girl added, rather seriously now.

"Splendid! Since you've seen yourself marrying a Chinese prince you'll be able to understand me perfectly. Now then, listen. But just a moment—I don't even know your name yet!"

"At last! You didn't think of it too soon, did you?"

"Oh good heavens, it never entered my head. I was happy enough without."

"My name is Nastenka."

"Nastenka—is that all?"

"That's all. Isn't it enough, you greedy man?"

"Enough? On the contrary, it's plenty, it's more than plenty. Nastenka, you must be a very kind-hearted girl since you're allowing me to call you Nastenka right away!"

"I hope I am. Well, carry on."

"Now then, Nastenka, just listen to this amusing story!"

I sat down beside her, assumed a primly grave attitude and began as if I were reciting a memorized passage.

"You may not be aware of it, Nastenka, but there are some rather queer corners in Petersburg. The sun, which shines for all the rest of the city, never seems to peep into those places. It's another sun that does, a new one, specially ordered for those remote corners, and it throws a different, a peculiar light on everything. Life in those remote corners seems a world apart, in no way resembling the life that seethes about us; it is the sort of life that could be going on in some fabulous and strange kingdom, and not on our planet at all, in these very, very serious times of ours. And this life is that peculiar mixture of

something that is purely fantastic, ardently idealistic and also, at the same time (alas, Nastenka), bleakly humdrum and ordinary, not to say incredibly banal."

"Oh! Good heavens, what a preamble! What am I going to hear, I wonder?"

"Nastenka (I think I'll never tire of saying your name), Nastenka, you'll hear that these remote corners are inhabited by some queer people—by dreamers. A dreamer—if you must know the precise definition of the word—is not a man, it's a creature of the neuter gender, you see. This creature usually settles down in some inaccessible corner, as if he were hiding from the very light of day, and once he crawls into his shell, he grows attached to it like a snail or, rather, in this respect he resembles that very amusing animal, which is a house and an animal all in one, called the turtle. Why is he so fond of his four walls, invariably coated with green paint, his grimy, dismal and outrageously smoke-blackened walls, do you think? Why, when one of his few friends comes to call on him—and he ends up by having no friends left at all—why does this funny gentleman receive his visitor in such a state of confusion, why is he so embarrassed,

his features so contorted, as if he had just committed a crime within his four walls, or had been engaged in forging banknotes or making up some verses he was going to send to a magazine, accompanied by an anonymous letter saying that the poet himself was dead, but he, his friend, considered it his sacred duty to have the rhymes published? Why, tell me, Nastenka, is the conversation between those two so stilted? Why is there neither laughter nor some witty remark from the puzzled visitor who, under other circumstances, is very fond of laughter and witty remarks, of discussing the fair sex and chatting on other cheerful subjects? Why does this friend, who is obviously a new acquaintance paying his first and only call (for in this case there will be no second, because the friend will never call again), why does this friend become so embarrassed and tongue-tied for all his quickness of wit (if he has it) when he sees the upset expression of his host, who in his turn has become utterly confused and deprived of all coherence after his valiant but vain attempts to cover the gaps and brighten up the conversation, to show that he, too, is well versed in the social niceties, to make

some sort of remark about the fair sex and with this deferential behaviour at least, to please the poor man who has lost his way and has come calling on him by mistake? Why does the visitor snatch up his hat so suddenly and hurry away, remembering all at once a most important and non-existent appointment, pulling his hand free of his host's feverish grasp, while the latter does everything he can to show that he is sorry and to try and remedy the situation? Why does the visitor burst out laughing as soon as he is out of the room, swearing there and then never to call on this queer man again, although, in point of fact, the queer man is a splendid chap really; but at the same time he cannot refuse his imagination to indulge in a little game. That is, to draw a comparison—far fetched though it be—between the face of his host, the way it looked all the time they were in conversation, and that of a miserable little kitten which, after being mauled about, terrorized and injured in every possible way by some children who have taken it prisoner by foul means, has in distraction crept away to hide from them under a chair, forced to spend a whole hour there, bristling and snorting, washing its hurt

little face with both paws, after which and for a long time to come, it is to look with animosity upon the world in general and even upon the bits and pieces from the master's table, saved up for it by the kind housekeeper."

"I say," broke in Nastenka, who had all this time been listening to me in wonder, with her eyes wide and lips parted. "I say, I have no idea why all this has happened or why you are asking me such funny questions at all; but what I know definitely is that all those experiences from beginning to end have happened to you."

"Undoubtedly," I replied with a most serious mien.

"Well if that is so, go on," she said, "because I very much want to know how it will all end."

"You want to know, Nastenka, what the hero was doing in his remote corner, or rather I, for the hero of the whole story was myself, my own modest self; you want to know why the unexpected visit of my friend threw me off my balance, disconcerting me for a whole day? You want to know why I was so startled and flustered when the door opened so suddenly; why I was incapable of receiving my visitor

properly and collapsed so ignominiously under the brunt of my own hospitality?"

"Yes, that's it," Nastenka replied. "That's what I'd like to know. Look, you are telling it splendidly, but couldn't you somehow make your speech less splendid? Because you sound as if you were reading it out of a book."

"Nastenka," I replied in a grave and stern voice, barely mastering my desire to laugh. "Dear Nastenka, I know that my speech is splendid, but I am sorry I cannot talk differently. At the moment, Nastenka dear, I'm like the ghost of King Solomon, which, after having been kept in a pot sealed down with seven seals, had at last had all the seven seals removed. My dear Nastenka, now that we have met again after our long separation—for I have known you a long time, Nastenka, I have long been searching for someone, and that is a sign that you are the one I have been searching for and that this meeting of ours has been preordained—now a thousand taps have burst open in my head, and I must give vent to a torrent of words or else I shall suffocate. And so I beg you not to interrupt me, Nastenka, but to hear me out meekly and attentively, or I shall say no more."

"No, no, no, oh, no, talk, do! I shan't say another word."

"To continue: there is one hour during my day which I am exceptionally fond of, my dear friend Nastenka. It's that particular hour when most of the work, duties and business is done, and everyone is hurrying home to dinner, to take a nap, or to spend the evening, the night, and all the rest of his leisure in various jolly pastimes, which he plans as he hurries along. At that hour our hero too—for you must permit me, Nastenka, to carry on this narrative in the third person, since I'd feel terribly bashful about telling all this in the first person—and so, our hero, whose day has not been idle either, strides on with everyone else. But his pale and somewhat wan face is aglow with a curious expression of pleasure. He watches, not indifferently, the setting sun slowly sinking in the cold sky of St. Petersburg. But when I say he watches it I'm telling a lie: he does not watch it, he contemplates it absently as it were, as if he were tired or engrossed in something else, something of greater interest, so all he could spare the world about him was a fleeting, rather casual moment. He is pleased because he is

through with his vexatious affairs until the morrow, and he is delighted like a schoolboy who has been allowed to leave the schoolroom and set free to play his favourite games and pranks. Just glance at him, Nastenka, you'll see at once that his pleasure has already had a happy effect on his weak nerves and his morbid imagination. Now he is lost in reverie. Do you think it's his dinner he is thinking of? Or the evening's amusements? What is he staring at so? Is it the gentleman of imposing appearance bowing so picturesquely to the lady who is driving past in a gleaming carriage drawn by fleet-footed horses? No, Nastenka, what do all those trifles mean to him now? He is rich with the wealth of his own peculiar world now; he came to these riches quite suddenly, it was not in vain that the parting ray of the setting sun flashed so merrily before him, warming his heart and stirring in it a host of fancies. He hardly notices the road where but a moment before he would have been struck by the merest trifles. For already the Goddess of Fancy (if you have read Zhukovsky, dear Nastenka) has whimsically interlaced the golden warp on her loom and has begun to weave a tissue of dreams

for him, dreams of a fabulous, fantastic life, and who knows, perhaps with her magic hand she has whisked him off the splendid granite pavement he was treading homewards to the seventh crystal heaven. If you stopped him and asked him abruptly where he was or what streets he had walked through, he probably wouldn't be able to remember a thing, neither where he had been nor where he was, and, blushing in his embarrassment, he would certainly have invented some tale to save his dignity. And that's why he is so startled, why he almost screams and looks about him in alarm, when a very respectable old lady stops him politely in the middle of the pavement and asks him to show her the way. Scowling with annoyance, he strides on, barely conscious of the passers-by who smile at him and turn back to look after him, or of the little girl who steps timorously out of his way and then bursts into peals of laughter when she sees his wide, contemplative smile and his gesticulating hands. But then the same Goddess of Fancy picks up and carries away on her playful flight the old lady, the curious passers-by, the laughing little girl and the boatmen, already eating their supper on their

barges which clutter up the Fontanka (that is, supposing our hero is passing it at the time); she mischievously weaves everyone and everything into her golden tapestry, the way flies are woven into a spider's web, and the queer man enters his delightful little lair endowed with this new wealth; he sits down, has his dinner and is only aroused from his dreams when Matryona, his pensive and ever sorrowful servant woman, has cleared the table and brought him his pipe. He stirs and remembers with surprise that he has already finished his dinner, having missed the process entirely. The room grows dark; emptiness and sadness fill his heart; a whole realm of fancy crumbles around him, crumbles away into dust with no noise or crash, it has flitted past like a dream, while he does not even remember what he has been dreaming about. But now some obscure sensation, a new desire, which makes his heart throb and ache a little, is exciting and stimulating his imagination seductively and, imperceptibly, calling up a throng of new spectres.... Silence reigns in the little room; fancy is basking in solitude and languor; it flares up softly, it begins to bubble like the water in old Matryona's coffee-

pot, as she fusses about in the kitchen next door, making her coffee with not another care in the world. Then his fancy begins to break through in little spurts of fire, and the book, taken up aimlessly and at random, falls from my dreamer's hand unread but for a page or two. His imagination is roused and tuned up again, and suddenly a new world, a new, fascinating world flashes before his mind in all its dazzling possibilities. A new dream—a new happiness! A new dose of poison, subtle and sensuous. What does he care for our real life! From his drugged point of view, you and I are leading such a slow, lazy, and sluggish life, Nastenka; from his point of view we are all so dissatisfied with our lot, we are finding life so wearisome. And indeed, look how cold, how sullen and angry we seem to be with one another. Poor souls, my dreamer thinks. And no wonder he thinks so! Look at the magic, animated picture those phantoms weave for him so fascinatingly, so intricately and so generously, with himself, of course, our dreamer in person, as the most important character, ever in the foreground. Look at the variety of adventures, look at the never ending flow of his rapturous dreams! You will ask, per-

haps, what does he dream of? Why ask? Of everything. Of being a poet, unacclaimed at first and later crowned with glory; of Hoffman's friendship, of St. Bartholomew's Night, of Diana Vernon, of playing a heroic part in the conquest of Kazan by Tsar Ivan, of Clara Mowbray, of Effie Deans, of the Council of Prelates with Huss before it, of the resurrection of the dead in *Roberta* (remember the music? that graveyard odour it has?), of Minna and Brenda, of the Battle at the Berezina, of reading poems in the salon of Countess V. D., of Danton, of Cleopatra *ei suoi amanti,* of a little house in Kolomna, a nook of his own and a lovely being beside him, listening to him on a wintry night with eyes wide and lips parted, the way you are listening to me now, my little angel. No, Nastenka, that sensual sluggard cares nothing for the life that you and I are so anxious to taste. He thinks it's a poor and wretched life, he cannot know that for him, too, the bell may toll sadly one day, when for a single hour of this wretched life he'd give all his years of fancy, not in exchange for joy or happiness either, he would not even want to choose in that hour of sorrow, regret, and untrammelled

grief. But until that wrathful hour strikes, he desires nothing, for he is above desire, for he already has everything, he is satiated, because he is his own artist, creating new worlds for himself whenever a new whim urges him. And then you know, this fairy-tale, this world of fancy can be created so easily, so naturally, as though it were indeed not a phantom at all! Truly, at times I quite believe that all that world is not a mirage, not the creation of my excited senses, not a trick played by my imagination, but that it's actually real, genuine, it exists. Then why, tell me, Nastenka, why is my spirit anguished at moments like those? Why then, what magic, what strange power makes the pulse quicken, brings tears to the dreamer's eyes, suffuses his pale, tear-stained cheeks with colour, and fills his whole being with a joy so heavenly? Why do his sleepless nights seem but mere seconds, passed as they are in infinite happiness and gaiety, and why, when the first rosy sunbeam flashes across the window and dawn sheds its eerie and uncertain light into his room, the way it does here in St. Petersburg, why does our dreamer, fatigued and exhausted, throw himself across his bed and fall asleep, swoon-

ing with ecstasy obsessing his diseased and shaken spirit, and with a pain so insufferably sweet filling his heart? Yes, Nastenka, it deceives you and you unwittingly come to believe that the passion stirring in his soul is real and genuine, you come to believe there is indeed something tangible, animate, in his incorporeal dreams. Think of the deceit of it! For instance, love enters his heart in all its infinite joyousness, with all its poignant torment. A mere glance at him will convince you! Would you believe it, looking at him, Nastenka dear, that he has never really known the one he has loved so in his rapturous dreams? Surely he could not have seen her in his deceptive fantasies alone and have only dreamed of this passion? Can it be true that they did not really go through so many years of their lives together, hand in hand, just the two of them, forsaking the whole world and blending their destinies, their two private worlds into one? Then was it not she who lay sobbing and grieving upon his breast that night, the night of parting, deaf to the storm that was raging beneath the grim sky, heedless of the wind that was blowing the tear-drops off her black eyelashes and

whisking them away? Surely it could not have all been a dream—that garden too, dismal, neglected, and wild, its paths overgrown with moss, that gloomy and lonely garden where they had walked so often, hoping, despairing, and loving, yes, loving each other so long, so long and so tenderly? And that strange ancestral home where she had lived for so many years in retirement and sadness with her morose, ever taciturn and choleric old husband who used to frighten them as if they were two timid children, concealing their love from each other so timorously and disconsolately? What agony they suffered, how frightened they were, how pure and innocent was their love, and how vicious people were (that goes without saying, Nastenka!). But good God, can it be that it was not her he met again long afterwards, far from the shores of his homeland, under a foreign sky, a hot and sultry sky in the beautiful eternal city, at a brilliant ball, to the resounding strains of the orchestra, at the palazzo (it had to be a palazzo) flooded with light; was it not her he saw on the balcony, entwined with roses and myrtle? Where, the moment she saw him, she lifted her mask so hastily, and whispering,

'I am free' flew, trembling, into his arms; with a cry of joy, they clung together, and in a moment everything was forgotten: their sorrow and their separation, all their sufferings, the gloomy house, the old and taciturn man, the cheerless garden in their distant homeland, the garden seat where with a parting, passionate kiss, she tore herself away from his arms, grown numb with the agony of despair. Oh Nastenka, you must agree that you would be startled, you'd blush and behave like a schoolboy who had just stuffed into his pocket an apple he had stolen from the neighbours' garden, if your door were suddenly flung open to admit an uninvited friend, some tall, robust chap, a merry soul and a wit, shouting as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened, 'And I'm just back from Pavlovsk this very minute, old chap!' Oh God! The old count was dead, the hour of ineffable happiness was nigh, and here was someone who had just arrived from Pavlovsk!"

I paused with pathos, having come to the end of my pathetic utterances. I remember how hard I strove to bring myself to laugh just then, for I could already feel some hostile imp stirring in my heart, my breath was

caught in my throat, my chin was beginning to quiver and my eyes were swimming more and more. I was afraid that Nastenka, who had been listening to me with her clever eyes wide open, would burst out laughing with her spontaneous, child-like laughter, and I felt sorry I had gone so far, had needlessly told that which had long been overburdening my heart, which I could recite like a passage committed to memory because I had long ago passed a verdict on myself and I had been tempted to read it out to her, although, I must admit, I did not expect to be understood. But, to my surprise, she remained silent and a little later pressed my hand lightly and asked with a note of timid interest:

"Have you really lived like that all your life?"

"All my life, Nastenka," I replied. "All my life, and I suppose I shall go on like this till the end."

"No, no, you can't!" she said anxiously. "It won't be so, for then I, too, might have to spend the rest of my life sitting beside my grandmama. Listen, do you know that it's not right at all to live like that?"

"I do, Nastenka, I do!" I cried, restraining my emotion no longer. "I know it better than

ever now that I have wasted the best years of my life. I know it now, and the knowledge hurts me more, for God Himself has sent you to me, my kind angel, to tell me this and to convince me in this knowledge. Now that I am sitting here beside you, talking to you, I dread the thought of the future, for the future holds nothing but loneliness again, nothing but that senseless, musty life; and what am I to dream of now that I have been so happy with you in reality! Oh, you dear girl, may you be blessed because you did not repulse me, because now I can say that I have lived at least two evenings in my life!"

"Oh no, no!" Nastenka cried, and teardrops glistened on her eyelashes. "No, it will not be so! We shall not part so casually! What are two evenings!"

"Nastenka, oh Nastenka! Do you know that you have reconciled me to myself for a long time to come now? Do you know that I shall no longer think so ill of myself as I am sometimes apt to do? Do you know that I may not despair any longer that I have committed a crime and a sin in my life, for a life like mine is a crime and a sin? And pray do not think I have exaggerated any-

thing to you, for heaven's sake do not think that, Nastenka, because at times I am possessed by melancholy, such utter melancholy.... Because when these spells come over me, I begin to think that I am incapable of ever starting to live a new, a real life, because it seems to me that I have already lost all touch, all sense of the real and the actual, because I had been selling my soul, because my nights of fantasy are now followed by moments of soberness, and they are frightening! And meanwhile, you can hear life clamouring and eddying about you in a human whirlpool, you can hear, you can see people living—living a real life, you can see that their world has not been made to order, that it will not be shattered like a dream or a vision, that their life is ever youthful, ever rejuvenescent, and that every hour in it differs from the last, whereas timorous fancy is bleak and monotonous to the point of boredom, a slave to every shadow and notion, a slave to the first cloud that blots out the sun and wrings with distress the heart of every true man of St. Petersburg who sets so much store by its sun—and what is fancy in distress? You can feel the constant strain

wearing out and exhausting your inexhaustible fancy at last, because you are maturing, you are outgrowing your former ideals; they are shattered to pieces, reduced to dust; if you have no other life to live, you are compelled to rebuild it out of the same broken bits and pieces. And yet your soul yearns for and demands something different! In vain the dreamer rakes up the ashes of his old dreams, hoping to find at least a tiny spark among the ruins in order to fan it to life again, to warm his chilled heart with this resurrected fire and bring back to it all that was so dear before, that moved it, that set his blood on fire, that wrung tears from his eyes and deceived him so gloriously! Do you know what I have come to, Nastenka? Do you know that I now have to mark the anniversary of my past emotions, of my affection for what has been before but actually had never happened, because this anniversary, too, has to be observed according to the same foolish, incorporeal dreams; I am driven to it because the foolish dreams themselves are no more, for I have nothing to support them with; you have to live your dreams too, you know. Do you know that now I like to

remember and revisit, on certain dates, the spots where I have once known happiness in my own peculiar way, I like to attune my present to my irrevocable past, and often I wander up and down the alleyways and streets of St. Petersburg like a ghost, depressed and sad, with no aim or purpose. Oh the memories that are mine! I recall, for instance, that here, exactly a year ago to the hour, I had wandered up and down the same pavement as lonely and depressed as I am now! And I recall that my dreams were just as sad, and though it wasn't any better then than it is now, you somehow can't help thinking that life was easier and more tranquil in those days, untroubled as it was by that black thought which is harassing me now; that I was not preyed upon by these pangs of conscience, grim and painful pangs, which give me no peace, day and night. And you ask yourself: where are those dreams of yours? You shake your head and say: how the years go by! And again you ask yourself: what have you done with your life? Where have you buried your best years? Have you lived or not? Look, you tell yourself, look how cold it's becoming in the world. More years

will pass, bringing dismal loneliness with them, and then shivering old age will come leaning on a crutch, and after that just misery and bleakness. Your phantom world will grow dim, your dreams will wither and fall like dead, yellow leaves. Oh Nastenka, won't it be sad to remain alone, entirely alone, with nothing even to regret—nothing, nothing at all . . . for whatever I lose, all that will have been nothing, a mere, stupid nought, nothing but dreams!"

"Stop, don't move me to further pity," said Nastenka, wiping away a tear-drop. "It's all over now! There will be two of us now, we'll never part again, no matter what happens to me. I am a simple girl. I have not studied much, though Grandmama did hire a teacher for me, but truly I can understand you, because everything you have just told me I went through myself when Grandmama kept me pinned to her dress. Of course I couldn't have told it as well as you have done, because I've never studied," she added bashfully, for she still felt a certain respect for the pathos of my speech and my lofty style. "But I am very glad you have opened your heart to me. Now I know you, I know

you perfectly. And d'you know, I want to tell you my story too, all of it without reserve, and for this you'll give me your advice afterwards. You are a very clever man; will you promise to give me your advice afterwards?"

"Ah Nastenka!" I replied. "Though I've never been an adviser, and a clever one at that, I see now that if we're to go on like this, it will be the best thing possible, and then each of us will advise the other most cleverly. Well, my pretty Nastenka, what do you want to know? Tell me frankly; I am so happy now, so gay, so daring and wise that I shan't be long in answering!"

"No, no," Nastenka interrupted, laughing, "it's not just a clever bit of advice I'm looking for, but sincere and brotherly counsel, the sort you'd give me if you had been fond of me all your life."

"Very well, Nastenka, very well!" I cried exultantly. "And had I been fond of you for twenty years, I nevertheless could not have been fonder of you than I am now!"

"Your hand!" said Nastenka.

"Take it!" I gave her my hand.

"And so we shall begin my story."

"You know half of my story already, at least you know that I have an old grandmother."

"If the other half is as brief as this one . . ." I broke in with a smile.

"Be quiet and listen. I must make one condition though: do not interrupt me or I'll make a muddle of it. Do listen quietly now.

"I have an old grandmother. I went to live with her when I was a very little girl, because both my mother and my father were dead. It must be presumed that Grandmama was wealthier then than she is now, for she still recalls those better days. She taught me French herself, and then she hired a tutor for me. When I was fifteen (I'm seventeen now), my studies came to an end. That was when I did that naughty thing; what it was I shall not tell you, sufficient to say that it was nothing much. But Grandmama called me to her one morning and said that being blind she could not keep an eye on me and, taking a safety pin, she pinned my dress to hers, and that's when she told me we'd stay like that for the rest of our days, unless I

improved, of course. Well, in the beginning there was no hope of getting away at all. I had to sit by Grandmama's side whether I was reading, studying or knitting. I tried cunning once, and talked Fyokla into taking my place. Fyokla is our servant woman, she's deaf. She took my seat; Grandmama fell asleep in her chair just then and I went off to see a girl who lived near by. It all ended badly of course. Grandmama woke up and said something, thinking I was still sitting quietly beside her. Fyokla saw that Grandmama was asking a question, but she could not hear what it was, she thought and thought what she should do, and then she undid the pin and ran away."

At this Nastenka burst out laughing. I laughed with her. She broke off at once.

"I say, you mustn't laugh at Grandmama. I can, because it's funny. Grandmama really can't help being like that, but I do love her a little anyway. I was punished good and proper then; back in my place I was put, and I could not so much as move a finger after that.

"Well then, I forgot to tell you that we, or rather Grandmama, has a house of her own,

that is a little cottage, with just three windows facing the street, it's all wooden and as old as Grandmama herself, and there's an attic; one day a new lodger moved into this attic."

"That means you had an old lodger, too," I remarked casually.

"Of course we had," Nastenka replied, "and that one could hold his tongue better than you can. It's true, he could hardly move his tongue at all by then. He was a little old man, he was thin, deaf, blind, and lame, at last he could not go on living any longer and so he died. That's why we had to have a new lodger, because we can't manage without one; that and Grandmama's pension is about all we have. As luck would have it, the new lodger was a young man, a newcomer, not a local man. Grandmama let him have the room because he didn't haggle over the rent, and then she asked me, 'Tell me, Nastenka, is our lodger a young man?' I did not want to tell a lie, so I said, 'He's not particularly young, Grandmama, neither is he old.' 'And is his appearance pleasing?' she asked. And again I did not want to tell a lie, so I said, 'Yes, his appearance is pleas-

ing.' And Grandmama said, 'Ah, what a shame, what a shame! I'm warning you, Granddaughter, don't you look at him or think of him. Dear me, what the world is coming to! Just imagine, a mere attic lodger and his appearance is pleasing too; it wasn't like this in my day!'

"Grandmama was always harping on 'her day.' She was younger in her day, and the sun shone warmer in her day, and cream did not turn sour so quickly then—everything went back to 'her day.' There was I sitting and thinking: now why does Grandmama herself put ideas into my head, asking me if our lodger was handsome and young? But the thought just occurred to me in passing, I took up my knitting again, counted the stitches, and forgot all about it.

"We had promised to paper our lodger's room for him, and so one morning he came in to inquire about it. One word led to another, Grandmama's chatty, you know, and then she said, 'Go to my bedroom, Nastenka, and fetch me the counting board.' I jumped up at once, blushing all over—I don't know why—and quite forgetting I was pinned down; instead of undoing the pin stealthily,

so the lodger shouldn't see, I started up and Grandmama's chair slid along the floor. When I saw that the lodger knew everything about me now, I blushed and froze to the spot, suddenly bursting into tears—the bitterness and shame of it was more than I could bear! Grandmama shouted, 'What are you standing there for?' and I cried harder than ever. When the lodger realized that I was ashamed because of him, he took his leave at once and went away.

"And ever afterwards, I almost died if I heard a sound in the hall. There comes the lodger, I'd think, and I would quietly undo the pin, just to be on the safe side. But it was never he, he never came. Two weeks went by; one day the lodger sent us a message through Fyokla to say that he had plenty of French books, all good books, fit to read, and he wondered if Grandmama would like me to read them to her for a change. Grandmama accepted his offer gratefully, but she kept asking if the books were moral, because if they were immoral, she said, 'It would never do for you to read them, Nastenka, because they'd teach you to do wrong.'

"'But what would they teach me, Grandmama? What's written in them?' I asked.

"'Ah,' she said, 'they're all about young men seducing decent girls, carrying them off from their parents' homes, pretending they want to marry them, abandoning these poor girls to their fate afterwards, and the end the girls come to is too sad to relate. I've read many such books,' Grandmama said, 'and they tell all this so beautifully, that you stay up all night, reading them on the quiet. So mind you don't ever read them, Nastenka! What sort of books has he sent, you say?'

"'Novels by Sir Walter Scott, all of them, Grandmama.'

"'Sir Walter Scott's novels? Are you sure there's no trick here? Take a look and see if he hasn't hidden a love letter in one of them.'

"'No, Grandmama,' I said, 'there is no letter.'

"'Look under the binding, they sometimes thrust them under the binding, the brigands!'

"'No, Grandmama, there's nothing under the binding either.'

"'Well mind there isn't!'

"And so we began to read Sir Walter

Scott, and in the space of a month we finished half the books. Then our lodger sent us more and more books, he sent us some Pushkin too, so finally I couldn't live without books, and I stopped dreaming of marrying a Chinese prince.

"That's how it was when one day I chanced upon our lodger on the stairs. Grandmama had sent me to fetch something. He stopped. I blushed, and he blushed too; he smiled, however, said how d'you do, asked how Grandmama was and then inquired, 'Have you read the books?' I replied, 'I have.' 'Which book did you like best?' he asked, and I said, 'I liked *Ivanhoe* and Pushkin best of all.' That was all there was on that occasion.

"A week later I came across him on the stairs again. Grandmama hadn't sent me that time, I had to get something for myself. It was after two, the hour when our lodger usually came home. 'How d'you do,' he said, and I said, 'How d'you do.' 'Tell me,' he said, 'don't you find it dull sitting with your grandmama all day long?'

"When he asked me that, I felt hot with shame and bitterness again, I really don't

know why unless it was because others were beginning to ask me questions about this business. I thought I'd say nothing and go away, but my strength failed me.

" 'You're a good girl,' he said, 'forgive me for talking to you like this, but I assure you I feel a deeper concern for you than your grandmama does. Have you no friends at all you could go and visit?'

"I told him I had none, there had been one, Mashenka, but she'd gone away to Pskov.

" 'Listen,' he said, 'would you like to come to the theatre with me?'

" 'The theatre? But what will Grandmama say?'

" 'Come without telling Grandmama.'

" 'No,' I said, 'I don't want to deceive Grandmama. Good-bye.'

" 'Good-bye," he said and didn't utter another word.

"And then after dinner the same day he came to us; he took a chair, talked long with Grandmama, asked her if she ever went out at all, and if she had any friends, and suddenly he said: 'I've taken a box for the Opera tonight, the *Barber of Seville* is on; some friends of mine were coming, but then they

changed their minds, and now I have the tickets to spare.'

"'The *Barber of Seville*!' Grandmama cried, 'Is that the same *Barber* they used to play in my day?'

"'Yes,' he said, 'the very same *Barber*.' And he gave me a look. I had understood it all already, I blushed and my heart leapt in anticipation.

"'Why, of course,' Grandmama said, 'of course, I know it! I myself used to play the part of Rosina in our private theatricals in the old days.'

"'Wouldn't you care to come tonight?' the lodger asked, 'I have the tickets, you know.'

"'Yes, I think we'll go,' said Grandmama. 'Why shouldn't we? And then my Nastenka has never been to the theatre yet.'

"Oh heavens, what joy! We began to get ready at once, we dressed and went. Although Grandmama is blind, she still wanted to hear the music and, besides, she's a kind-hearted old lady; she wanted to give me a treat, we'd never have arranged to go by ourselves. I can't tell you what my impressions were of the *Barber of Seville*, but I will say that all evening long our lodger

kept looking at me so kindly, he spoke to me so gently that I instantly grasped that he had only been putting me to the test that morning, when he asked me to go alone with him. I was overjoyed. I went to sleep that night feeling so proud and happy, my heart beat so, it made me slightly feverish, and all night long I raved of the *Barber of Seville.*

"I thought that now he'd come calling on us more and more frequently, but I was quite mistaken. He almost ceased coming altogether. He'd drop in casually once a month or so, and only to invite us to come to the theatre again. We did go once or twice. But I wasn't pleased with that at all. I saw that he was merely sorry for me because Grandmama was treating me so badly, and that was all there was to it. I brooded and brooded and then something came over me: I couldn't sit still, I couldn't read, I couldn't work at my knitting, I'd laugh sometimes and do something to spite Grandmama, or another time I'd simply weep. I grew so thin, I almost fell ill. The Opera season was over and our lodger stopped coming to see us altogether; when we happened to meet—on the same stairs of course—he would bow to

me so gravely and so silently as if he didn't want to talk to me at all, and he'd be out on the porch and away, while I still stood halfway up the stairs, blushing red like a cherry, because whenever I saw him all the blood would come rushing to my head.

"It's almost the end now. Last May, our lodger called on Grandmama and told her that since he had completed all his affairs here, he would be going away to Moscow again for a year. When I heard this, I paled and sank fainting on to a chair. Grandmama noticed nothing, while he, after announcing his departure, bowed and left.

"What was I to do? I thought and thought, I fretted and worried, and at last I came to a decision. He was to leave on the morrow and I made up my mind to take the final step that very evening after Grandmama had retired. And this I did. I made a bundle of all the dresses I had and some underclothes, and with the bundle in my arms, more dead than alive, I climbed the attic stairs to our lodger's room. I think it took me an hour to climb those stairs. I pushed open his door and he gasped when he saw me. He thought I was a ghost. And then he rushed to get me

some water for I could hardly stand. My heart was beating so loudly, that my head hurt and my mind reeled. When I recovered, I simply put my bundle on his bed and sat down beside it, and, covering my face with my hands, I dissolved in tears. He must have understood everything at once, he stood before me so pale and with such a sad look in his eyes that it tore at my heart.

" 'Nastenka,' he began, 'pray listen to me: I cannot do anything; I'm a poor man; I have nothing yet, not even a decent post; what would we live on if I married you?'

"We talked for a long time and finally, in my distraction, I told him I could not live with Grandmama any longer, that I would run away, that I did not want to be pinned down with a safety pin, and that I'd go to Moscow with him whether he wished it or not, because I could not live without him. It was everything—shame, love, and pride, all welling up in me at once, and I fell on his bed, practically in a fit. I so dreaded his refusal!

"He sat on in silence for a few minutes, then he stood up, came close to me and took my hand in his.

"'My dear, my kind Nastenka,' he began, and he was weeping too. 'Hear me out. I swear to you, if ever I am in a position to marry, you and no one else will be the one to make me happy. Believe me when I say that you alone could make me happy now. Listen then: I am going away to Moscow and I shall remain there exactly a year. I hope I shall have settled my affairs by then. When I come back, and if you have not ceased loving me, I swear to you we shall be happy. But now it is impossible, I cannot, I have no right to offer anything at all. I repeat, though, that if it does not happen in a year's time, some day it certainly will; it's understood, of course, that it is only in the event of your not preferring another to me, for I cannot and dare not bind you with a promise.'

"That's what he said to me, and he left the following day. We had agreed not to breathe a word of this to Grandmama. He wished it so. There it is, my story is almost finished now. Exactly a year has passed. He has come back, he's been here for three whole days, and...."

"And what?" I cried, impatient to hear the end of the story.

"And he has not shown up yet!" Nastenka replied with an obvious effort. "No word or sound from him."

She stopped, paused a little, dropped her head and, suddenly burying her face in her hands, began to weep so dreadfully it wrung my heart. Never had I expected such an ending.

"Nastenka," I began in a timid and coaxing voice. "Nastenka, for heaven's sake don't cry! How can you know? He may not be here yet."

"He is, he is," Nastenka took up, "he's here, I know it. We had it all settled the night before he left; when everything had been said and agreed between us, the way I told you now, we came out for a breath of air to this very spot here. It was ten o'clock, we sat on this bench, I wasn't crying any more, I listened enraptured to what he was saying . . . he said he'd come to me the moment he returned, and if I didn't refuse him, we would tell Grandmama all about it. And now he's back, I know it, and yet he doesn't come, he doesn't come!"

She burst out crying again.

"Good God! Can nothing at all be done to help?" I cried, and sprang up from the bench in utter despair. "Tell me, Nastenka, perhaps if I went and saw him it would help?"

"Could you, d'you think?" she asked, suddenly raising her head.

"No, of course not," I caught myself up. "I have another idea: write him a letter."

"No, I couldn't possibly, it isn't done," she replied resolutely, but at the same time she dropped her eyes and tried to avoid my gaze.

"Why not? Why isn't it done?" I continued, carried away by my suggestion. "But it must be a special letter, you know. It all depends on the way it's worded. Oh Nastenka, it's truly so! Put your trust in me, pray do! I would not give you ill advice. All this can be put right. You were the one who made the first step then, why not now?"

"No, no, it will seem that I'm being too forward."

"Ah, my dear sweet Nastenka!" I smiled as I interrupted her. "It won't, it won't, it is your right because he gave you his word. And then, from all you've told me, I can see that he's a tactful man, he acted honourably," I went on, exulting more and more in

the logic of my own reasoning and persuasions. "How did he act? He bound himself with a promise. He said he would not marry anyone but you if ever he married at all, and at the same time he left you perfectly free to refuse him whenever you wished. Therefore you are justified in taking the first step, you have the right, you have the advantage over him, supposing now you wanted to release him from his promise. . . ."

"Tell me, how would you write it?"

"Write what?"

"This letter."

"I'd say, 'Dear Sir. . . .' "

"Must it be dear sir?"

"Certainly. But I don't know, perhaps. . . ."

"Never mind. Go on!"

" 'Dear Sir, I am sorry I. . . .' On second thought no, you need make no excuses. The fact itself will justify everything; write it simply: 'I am writing to you. Forgive me my impatience, but for a whole year now I have lived in hopes of happiness. Am I to blame that now I cannot bear a day of doubt? You have come back, you may have changed your mind. In that case this letter will tell you that I neither repine nor judge you. I do not

judge you because I have no power over your heart—such is my fate!

" 'You are a man of honour. You will neither smile nor be annoyed with my impatient lines. You will remember that the one who is writing them is a poor, lonely girl, who has no one to guide or advise her; one who has never been able to master her heart. But forgive the doubt that for a single moment crept into my soul. You are incapable of hurting, even in your thoughts, the one who loved you so and loves you still.' "

"Yes, yes, it's exactly the way I thought it should be," Nastenka cried, and her eyes shone with joy. "Oh you have dispelled my doubts, it's God Himself who sent you to me! Thank you! Thank you!"

"For what—for having been sent to you by God Himself?" I said, looking in delight at her joyful face.

"Yes, if only for that."

"Ah Nastenka! Sometimes, you know, we're grateful to some people for merely living in the same world with us. I'm grateful to you because we came to know each other, because for the rest of my life now I shall remember you!"

"Enough, enough! And now, listen to what I have to say: we had arranged it between us that as soon as he came back he'd let me know at once, by leaving a letter for me with some friends of mine, good, simple people, who know nothing at all about this; or, if he were unable to write to me, for you can't always say everything in a letter, he'd come here the very day of his return at ten o'clock sharp, to this spot where we had made our rendezvous. I know he has arrived, but it's three days now and he has neither come himself, nor left a letter for me. It's quite impossible for me to leave my grandmama during the day. Will you then go to these good people I told you about tomorrow and leave my letter with them? They'll send it on, and if there is an answer, you are to bring it here yourself at ten o'clock."

"But the letter! The letter! You must write the letter first, you know! It won't be until the day after tomorrow then."

"The letter..." said Nastenka in some confusion, "why ... the letter...."

She did not finish. At first she turned away from me, then she blushed like a rose and, suddenly, I felt the letter in my hand, evi-

dently written long ago, all ready, addressed and sealed. A wisp of memory, tender and delicate, flitted through my mind.

"Ro—Ro, si—si, na—na," I began.

"Rosina!" we sang together, I—all but embracing her in my joy, and she—blushing to the roots of her hair, laughing through the tears which glistened like tiny pearls on her black eyelashes.

"Enough, enough! Good-bye, good-bye now!" she said hastily. "Here is the letter, and here is the address where you're to take it. Good-bye till tomorrow!"

She pressed my hands warmly, nodded her head and flew like an arrow into her alley-way. I remained where I was for a long time, following her with my eyes.

"Till tomorrow! Till tomorrow!" raced through my mind, when she had disappeared from view.

THIRD NIGHT

This was a rainy and doleful day, with never a glimmer of light, a day like my lonely old age will be. Strange thoughts are crowding in on me, feelings so obscure, problems so vague are thronging my mind, and

yet I somehow lack both strength and desire to give them clarity. No, it is not for me to solve all this!

We shall not meet tonight. Clouds had begun to gather in the sky and a mist had risen when we said good-bye to each other the previous night. I said the weather would be bad the next day; she made no reply, she did not want to disappoint herself: for her the day would be clear and bright, without the flimsiest cloud to overshadow her happiness.

"If it rains we shall not see each other," she had said. "I shall not come."

I thought she wouldn't even have noticed today's rain, and yet she had not come.

Last night we had our third rendezvous, our third white night....

It is remarkable, however, what beauty one attains through happiness and joy! How one's heart abounds with love! You feel you want to pour out all your love into another heart, you want everything about you to resound with gaiety and laughter. And joy—how contagious it is! The night before there had been such tenderness in her words, such kindness in her heart. She was so sweet to

me, so considerate of my feelings, she gave me hope and heart in such caressing tones! Oh what a world of coquetry, inspired by her happiness! And I . . . I thought that it was genuine, I thought that she. . . .

But good God, how could I have thought it? How could I have been so blind when everything belonged to another already, when nothing was mine; when her very tenderness, her solicitude, her love—yes, even her love for me—was nothing but her delight in the coming rendezvous with the other one, her eagerness to urge her happiness on me. . . . Because she did frown, she did grow frightened and shy when he failed to come, when we had waited for him in vain. All her movements, all her words became less light, less playful and gay. And strange to say, she redoubled her attentions to me, as if she instinctively wanted to pour out on me that which she herself was hoping for and which she dreaded to think might not come true. My Nastenka grew so frightened and perplexed that I believe she finally came to understand my love for her and took pity on my poor heart. Thus, when we ourselves are unhappy, we are more sensitive to the unhappi-

ness of others; feeling then is not destroyed in us but concentrated rather....

I went to her with a warm heart, eager for the hour of the rendezvous to arrive. I had no foreboding then of what I should be feeling now. I had no foreboding that it would end thus. She was radiant with joy, she was awaiting his reply. He himself was to be her reply. He was to come, to come running to her call. She was there a full hour before I was. Everything amused her at first, she laughed at every word I said.

I was about to tell her what was in my heart, but did not.

"D'you know why I'm so delighted?" she said. "Why I'm so delighted with you? Why do I love you so today?"

"No, why?" I asked, and my heart fluttered.

"I love you so because you have not fallen in love with me. Why, anyone else in your place would have pestered me and worried me, would have moped and sighed, and you are so nice!"

At this she crushed my hand so hard I almost cried out. She laughed.

"What a wonderful friend you are!" she said very gravely a minute later. "Why, God Himself has sent you to me. Just think, what would have become of me if you hadn't been with me now? You are so unselfish! Your love for me is so generous! We shall be great friends after I am married, greater friends than if we were brother and sister. I shall love you almost as much as him."

For a moment I felt so dreadfully sad; however, something not unlike laughter was stirring in my heart.

"You're in a fit," I said, "you're frightened, you think he will not come."

"Heavens, no!" she replied. "Were I less happy I believe I could have cried now from your reproaches and your lack of faith. However, you've given me food for days of thought, but I shall think about it later, and now I confess to you that what you said is true. Yes, it is. I'm all upset somehow, I'm all anticipation and my feelings are somehow too vulnerable. But enough, let us leave our feelings aside."

The sound of footsteps startled us: a man's form emerged from the gloom and came towards us. We both trembled; she almost

cried out. I dropped her hand and made as if to leave her. But we were wrong: it was not he.

"What are you afraid of? Why did you drop my hand?" she asked, and gave me her hand again. "Well then, why not? We'll meet him together. I want him to see how much we love one another."

"How much we love one another!" I cried.

"Oh Nastenka, oh Nastenka!" I thought. "How much that one word means! Love like this weighs upon the spirit heavily and chills the heart. Your hand is cool and mine is hot like fire. Oh Nastenka, how blind you are!... Oh how intolerable a happy person is at times! But I could not be angry with you!"

At last I could contain my feelings no longer.

"Nastenka!" I cried. "Do you know what I have been through since last night?"

"No, what? Tell me quickly! Why didn't you say anything until now?"

"To begin with, Nastenka, after I had carried out all your errands, delivered the letter and been to your kind friends, I came

home ... after that I came back home and went to sleep."

"Is that all?" she laughed, interrupting me.

"Yes, almost all," I replied with an effort, for stupid tears were welling up in my eyes. "I awoke an hour before our rendezvous, but I did not seem to have slept at all. I do not understand exactly what it was. I came here to tell you all about it, to tell you that time had seemed to stop for me, that from that moment on one feeling alone, one sensation would have to remain with me for ever after, that the moment would have to last an eternity, as if all life had stopped for me. When I awoke I thought I was remembering a melody that I knew long ago, something sweet, once heard somewhere and then forgotten. It seemed to me that all my life it had been striving to burst forth from my heart and only now...."

"Oh good heavens! Good heavens!" Nastenka broke in. "What is all this about? I don't understand a word you're saying!"

"Ah Nastenka! I so wanted to try and make you feel this strange sensation..." I began miserably in a voice which still held a particle of hope, though only a very minute one.

"Hush, don't go on," she said, and in a flash she understood all, the clever girl!

All at once she became rather unusually talkative, gay, and playful. She took my arm, she laughed and tried to make me laugh as well, and every word I uttered in my confusion evoked in her long peals of laughter. I was getting angry and, abruptly, she changed to a flirtatious tone.

"D'you know," she said, "it does vex me a little that you have not fallen in love with me. Puzzle a woman's heart out after this! But anyway, Mister Adamant, you cannot but praise me for my frankness. I tell you everything, everything, no matter how silly the thought that comes into my head!"

"Listen! Can it be eleven?" I said, listening to the rhythmic booming of the bell in the town tower far away. She broke off her laughter, suddenly lapsing into silence, and began to count the strokes.

"Yes, it is eleven," she brought out at last in a timid and quavering voice.

I instantly felt sorry I had frightened her and had made her count the hours, and I cursed myself for my fit of malice. Her plight saddened me and I did not know how to

atone for my sin. I began to console her, to invent excuses for him, to try and prove to her that his failure to come was justified. There was no one easier to convince than Nastenka at a moment like this, or, rather, I should say that at a moment like this anyone is apt to listen gladly to any sort of consolation, and is extremely relieved if there is the faintest shadow of a pretext to be found.

"It's really funny, you know," I said, warming to my subject more and more, and glorying in the extraordinary lucidity of my arguments. "He couldn't, have possibly come! You've deceived and confused me too, Nastenka, so much so that I've mixed up all the time factors. Just think a moment: the letter could have hardly reached him yet; supposing he can't come, supposing he's writing a reply, but then you wouldn't get it till tomorrow! I'll go and fetch it as early as can be tomorrow, and I'll let you know at once. Try to imagine the thousands of unexpected things which could have happened: what if he wasn't in when your letter arrived, and it may be that he hasn't even read it yet! After all, anything may have happened."

"Of course, of course!" Nastenka replied. "I never thought of it. I dare say anything may have happened," she went on in a most compliant tone which was marred, however, by a false note struck by some vague and contrary thought of hers. "Now this is what you must do," she said, "go there as early as you can tomorrow and if you find an answer, let me know at once. You know where I live, don't you?" And she told me her address again.

And then she suddenly became so sweet to me, so tender. She appeared to be listening intently to all I was saying to her, but when I put a direct question to her, she made no reply and turned her face away from me in embarrassment. I looked into her eyes —yes, that was it, she was crying.

"Oh dear me, dear me! What a baby you are! What childishness! Come now!"

She tried to smile, to pull herself together, but her chin quivered and her bosom still heaved.

"It's you I'm thinking of," she said after a pause. "You're so good, my heart would have been made of stone if I were incapable of feeling it. D'you know what has occurred to me now? I was comparing the two of you.

Why isn't he—you? Why is he not like you? You are better than he is, even though I do love him more."

I made no reply at all. She seemed to be expecting me to say something.

"It may be, of course, that I do not quite understand him yet, that I do not know him well enough. You know, I think I've always been afraid of him, he was always so serious, sort of proud. Of course I know he only looks like that, there's more tenderness in his heart than in mine. I remember the way he looked at me that time I went to him with my bundle. But still, I think I have too much respect for him and that sounds as if we weren't equals, doesn't it?"

"No, Nastenka, no!" I replied. "It means that you love him more than anything in the world, and more than you love yourself."

"Yes, I suppose that's it," the simple-hearted girl agreed. "But you know what occurred to me now? Only this has nothing to do with him at all. I'm speaking generally: I've been thinking of all this for a long time. Now why can't we all be brothers? Why do even the best of people seem to be keeping something back, something secret from the

others? Why not just put into words whatever you have in your heart, if you know you mean it? Yet everyone tries to look more forbidding than he really is, as though afraid it would be an insult to his feelings if they were displayed too soon."

"Ah Nastenka, it's true what you are saying, but there are many different reasons for it," I put in, curbing my own feelings more than ever at that moment.

"No, no," she cried, profoundly moved, "you, for one, are not like the others. I really don't know how best to tell you the way I feel, but it seems to me that you, for one ... now, for instance ... it seems to me that you are sacrificing something for me," she added softly with a fleeting glance at me. "You must forgive my saying this to you, I am but a simple girl, I have not seen much of the world yet, and indeed I don't know how to say things sometimes," she said in a voice trembling with some secret emotion, which she tried to conceal with a smile. "But I just wanted to tell you how grateful I am to you, that I can feel all this too. Oh may you be blessed with happiness for this! And as for all those things you told me about your

dreamer the other day, none of it is true, that is, I mean, it has nothing to do with you at all. You are recovering, you really are quite different from what you have described yourself to be. If ever you come to love someone, I wish you every happiness with her. There's nothing I can wish her, for she will indeed be happy with you. I know, I'm a woman myself, and you must believe me if I say so."

She fell silent and pressed my hand warmly. In my excitement I could not say anything either. Several minutes passed.

"It's obvious he will not come tonight," she said at last, lifting her head. "It's late."

"He'll come tomorrow," I said in a most firm and convincing tone of voice.

"Yes," she added, brightening. "I can see it myself now—he'll only come tomorrow. Well, good-bye! Till tomorrow! If it rains I may not come. But the day after tomorrow I will, I'll come for certain, no matter what; and you be sure to come; I want you to, I'll tell you everything."

And later, when we were parting, she gave me her hand and said, looking at me candidly:

"We shall always be together now, shan't we?"

Oh Nastenka, Nastenka! If you only knew how lonely I am now!

When the clock struck nine I could bear my room no longer. I dressed and went out in spite of the rain. I went there and sat on our bench. I started down her alleyway, but I felt ashamed and came back without so much as a glance at her windows, turning away before I reached her home. I came back to my room in such despair as I had never known before. What a wet and dreary day! I would have wandered there all night if it hadn't been for the weather.

But till tomorrow! Till tomorrow! Tomorrow she'll tell me everything.

There was no letter today. But then there shouldn't have been. They are together now.

FOURTH NIGHT

Oh God, the way it all ended! The end of it all!

I came at nine o'clock. She was already there. I saw her when I was still some distance away: she stood leaning against the

railing as on that first night, and she did not hear me approach her.

"Nastenka!" I called out, fighting down my excitement with an effort.

She turned round promptly.

"Well!" she said. "Tell me quickly!"

I stood looking at her in bewilderment.

"Well, where's the letter? Have you brought the letter?" she repeated, clutching at the railing with one hand.

"No, I have no letter," I said at last. "Hasn't he been yet?"

She turned dreadfully pale and stared at me fixedly for a long time. I had shattered her last hope.

"Oh well, let him be," she brought out at last, her voice breaking. "Let him be, if he wants to leave me like this."

She lowered her eyes, then she wanted to look into mine, but could not. She struggled against her emotion a few minutes longer but, suddenly, she turned away and, leaning on the railing, sobbed.

"Come, come," I began, but I had not the strength to go on as I looked at her, and then what was there to say?

"Don't console me," she said through her tears. "Don't talk to me about him, don't tell me he'll come, don't tell me he has not abandoned me so cruelly, so inhumanly. But why? Why? Surely there was nothing in that letter of mine, that miserable letter, was there?"

She broke off, choking with sobs; my heart was wrung as I watched her.

"Oh how inhumanly cruel of him!" she began again. "And not a line, not a single line! At least he could have written that he did not want me any longer, that he was casting me off; but not a line in three whole days! How easy he finds it to insult and hurt a poor, defenceless girl, whose only fault is that she loves him! Oh what I have suffered in those three days! Oh my God, oh my God! When I remember that it was I who came to him that first time, that I humbled myself before him, weeping and begging him for love, even if it were only a tiny drop of love! And after all that!... Listen," she turned to me and her black eyes flashed, "it isn't so! It can't be so! It's absurd! One of us has made a mistake, either you or I; perhaps he hasn't received my letter yet? Perhaps he

still knows nothing about it? Because how can one—tell me for heaven's sake, judge for yourself, explain it to me for I cannot understand it—how can one treat anyone so brutally, so harshly as he has treated me? Not a single word! Even the most wretched of the wretched is shown more compassion. Perhaps he's heard something about me, perhaps someone's carried tales to him about me?" she cried, turning to me with her last question. "What do you think?"

"Look here, Nastenka, I'll go and speak to him tomorrow on your behalf."

"And then?"

"I'll ask him about everything. I'll tell him all."

"And what then?"

"You'll write him a letter. Do not say no, Nastenka, don't say no. I shall make him respect your gesture, he'll learn everything and if...."

"No, my friend, no," she broke in. "Enough! Not a word, not one word from me, not a line—enough! I do not know him, I do not love him any more, I shall forget him ..." she could not go on.

"Hush now, compose yourself, come sit

down here, Nastenka!" I said as I helped her to the bench.

"But I am composed. Don't worry. It's nothing. These are just tears, they'll dry. Did you think I was going to end my life, to drown myself?"

My heart was in my throat; I wanted to speak but could not utter a word.

"Tell me," she continued, taking my hand in hers. "You would not have done this, would you? You would not have abandoned the one who came to you herself, you would not have flung into her face your brazen contempt for her poor, foolish heart? Wouldn't you have taken care of her? Wouldn't you have realized that she had been alone, that she did not know how it began, that she had not known how to protect herself from her love for you, that she was not to blame, that she was not at fault ... that she had done no wrong! Oh God! Oh dear God!"

"Nastenka!" I cried, no longer master of my feelings. "Nastenka! You are tormenting me! You are breaking my heart, you are killing me, Nastenka! I cannot remain silent! I must speak, I must at last lay bare before you all that is overwhelming my heart!"

I rose from the bench as I said it. She took my hand and looked at me in wonder.

"What is it?" she spoke at last.

"Nastenka," I said with resolution, "listen to me, Nastenka! What I am about to tell you is nothing but a foolish, hopeless dream, it's all nonsensical. I know that it can never come true, but I cannot keep silent now. In the name of that which is making you suffer I entreat you to forgive me beforehand."

"But what is it?" she said, her eyes dry and fastened on mine with a strange light of curiosity and surprise in them. "What is it, what is the matter?"

"I know it's hopeless, but I love you, Nastenka! There you are! I've said it all now!" I said with a hopeless gesture. "After this it's for you to judge whether you can go on talking to me the way you have done, and moreover, whether you can listen to what I am about to say to you."

"But why not?" Nastenka interrupted me. "What of it? Of course I've always known you cared for me, but I kept fancying you just loved me so, just like that. Oh dear, oh dear!"

"It was like that at first, Nastenka, but now ... now I feel just as you felt when you went to him with your bundle. Worse than you felt, Nastenka, because he loved no other, and you do."

"What is it you're saying to me? I don't understand you at all. But listen, what is this for, or rather not what is it for, but why did you ... and so suddenly ... heavens! I'm talking nonsense! But you...."

And Nastenka grew utterly confused. Her cheeks flushed crimson, and she modestly averted her gaze.

"But what can I do, Nastenka, what can I do? I am at fault, I took ill advantage.... But no, I'm not, Nastenka; I can feel it, I can hear it, for my heart tells me I am right, for I could never hurt you or insult you! I was your friend; well, I'm still your friend; I have not betrayed a trust. See the tears flowing down my face, Nastenka? Let them flow, let them, they do no harm! They'll dry, Nastenka."

"Oh sit down, do sit down," she said, pulling me down beside her. "Oh dear, oh dear!"

"No, Nastenka, I shall not sit down; I cannot remain here any longer, you are not

to see me any more; I'll say everything and go. I only wanted to tell you that you would never have learned of my love. I would have kept my secret. I would never have thought of tormenting you at a moment like this with my selfishness. But it was more than I could bear; you started speaking of it yourself, it's your fault, you are to blame for everything, and not I. You cannot drive me away from you."

"But no, I'm not driving you away, no!" Nastenka said, doing her best to hide her confusion, the poor dear.

"You will not drive me away? No? And I was going to flee from you myself. I shall go away, but before I do I'll tell you everything, because when you were talking to me just now I could hardly contain myself, and when you were crying and tormenting yourself with the thought that you, well ... that you (forgive me mentioning it, Nastenka) were being cast off, that your love was being scorned, I felt, I knew there was so much love in my heart for you, Nastenka, so much love! And it grieved me bitterly that I could not help you with this love of mine ... it broke my heart and I, I could

not hold my silence, I had to speak, Nastenka, I had to speak!"

"Yes, go on, speak to me, do speak to me like this!" Nastenka said with an unfathomable expression. "To you it may seem strange to hear me say this ... but speak, speak! I'll tell you afterwards! I'll tell you everything!"

"You are sorry for me, Nastenka, you're just sorry for me, my little friend! Well, what's done is done! You can't unsay what has been said. Isn't it so? You know everything now. So let this be our starting point. Very well, everything is splendid now! But do hear me out. When you were sitting there and crying, I thought to myself (do let me say what it was I thought), I thought that (well, of course it could never be, Nastenka), I thought that you ... I thought that somehow you, well, in quite a detached sort of way, did not love him any more. And then—I was thinking about this last night, and the night before last, too, Nastenka—and then I'd do something, I would certainly do something to make you love me; you did tell me, you told me yourself, Nastenka, that you had almost come to love me. Well then, what was

I going to say? Oh well, I think I've said it all; all I could tell you now is what it would have been if ever you loved me—only this and nothing more! Listen then, my dear friend—for after all you are my friend—I'm an ordinary man, of course, I'm poor and so insignificant, but that's not the point (I seem to be talking out of turn, but it's my shyness, Nastenka), the thing is that I'd love you so, I'd love you so that you would never feel the burden of my love in any way, even if you still cared and went on caring for the other one, whom I do not know. All you would ever be conscious of, all you would ever feel would be a heart beating constantly beside you, a grateful, ardent heart, that would belong to you for ever. Oh Nastenka! Nastenka! What have you done to me!"

"Please don't cry, I don't want you to cry," said Nastenka, quickly rising from the bench. "Come, get up, come with me, don't weep now, don't weep," she spoke and wiped my tears with her handkerchief. "Well, come along now, I may have something to tell you. Now that he's abandoned me, now that he's forgotten me, though I love him still (I

do not wish to deceive you) ... but tell me, answer me. If, for instance, if I came to love you, that is, if only.... Oh my friend, my friend! When I remember, when I just think of the way I wounded you when I laughed at your love, when I praised you for not having fallen in love with me! Why didn't I foresee it, why didn't I? How foolish I must have been, but ... well, I've decided, I'll tell you everything."

"Wait, Nastenka, I think I should leave you in peace and go. I'm only tormenting you. Your conscience has begun to worry you now because you laughed at me, and I do not wish it, no, I do not wish it, you have your own sorrow to bear ... it's my fault of course, Nastenka, good-bye!"

"Stop, listen to me; could you wait?"

"Wait—what for?"

"I love him, but it will pass, it must pass, it cannot but pass; it's passing now, I can feel it ... who knows, perhaps it will be over this very night, because I hate him, because he treated me with scorn whereas you wept with me, you love me and that is why you have not cast me off as he has done, he has never loved me, and then because I love you

too ... yes, I do! I love you as you love me! I told you so before, you know I did—I love you because you are better than he is, because you are more honourable, because, because...."

Poor Nastenka, she was so overwhelmed, she could not go on, she leaned her head against my shoulder, then dropped it on my breast and shed bitter tears. I tried to comfort her, to soothe her, but she could not check her tears; she kept pressing my hand and repeating through her sobs, "One moment, one moment, I'll stop now! I want to tell you ... do not think these tears mean anything—I'm just crying from weakness, it'll be over in a moment." At last her sobbing ceased, she dried her tears and we walked on. I was about to speak, but she begged me to wait. We both lapsed into silence. At last she collected herself and began:

"Now then, please do not think that I am so inconstant and flighty in my affections," she said in a weak and shaky voice but with a sudden ring of something that plunged straight into my heart and throbbed there with a delicious ache; "please do not think

that I am capable of forgetting so easily and quickly, or of betraying.... I loved him for a whole year, and I swear to God that never, never even in my thoughts, have I been untrue to him. He scorned this; he mocked me —let him be! But he has wounded me, he has insulted my love. I ... I do not love him, for I can only love someone who is generous, understanding, and honourable, for this is what I'm like myself, and he is unworthy of me—well, let him be! He acted well, it would have been much worse if I were to be disappointed in him afterwards, when I had got to know him for what he was.... It is all over now! But who knows, my kind friend," she went on, closing her fingers around mine, "who knows, perhaps this very love of mine was a mirage, a play of my imagination, perhaps it all began with naughtiness and trifles because I was never allowed out of Grandmama's sight? Perhaps it is not him that I should love, perhaps another, a different man, one who would pity me and ... and.... No, let's leave it, let's leave it," Nastenka cut herself short abruptly, breathless with excitement. "I only wanted to say ... I wanted to tell you that if, in spite of my

loving him (no, my having loved him), if, in spite of this, you say once more ... if you feel that your love is so great it can really drive the other from my heart ... if you want to take pity on me, if you do not wish to abandon me to my fate, alone, disconsolate, deprived of hope, if you want to love me for ever the way you love me now, I swear that my gratitude ... that my love will be worthy of yours. Will you take my hand, after this?"

"Nastenka!" I shouted, while sobs choked me. "Nastenka! Oh Nastenka!"

"Enough, enough! It's enough, it's quite enough!" she spoke with an effort. "Everything has been said now, hasn't it? You are happy now, and so am I; not another word about it, not just yet, have mercy on me!... Do talk of something else, for heaven's sake!"

"Yes, Nastenka, of course! Enough of this, I'm happy now, I ... yes, let us talk of something else, Nastenka, let us find another subject quickly, yes! I'm ready...."

We couldn't find anything to talk about, we laughed, we cried, we said a thousand senseless, disconnected words; we walked

up and down the embankment, or we suddenly retraced our steps and started across the road, we stopped and crossed back to the railing again; we were like two children.

"I live all by myself now, but tomorrow..." I began. "You know I'm poor, of course, Nastenka, all I have is a thousand two hundred a year, but that doesn't matter...."

"Of course it doesn't, and then Grandmama receives her pension; she won't be a burden to us. We must take Grandmama."

"We must take Grandmama, of course ... but then there's Matryona...."

"Oh yes, we've got our Fyokla, too!"

"Matryona is a good soul, her only fault is she has no imagination, no imagination whatsoever, Nastenka, but that doesn't matter."

"Never mind, they can both stay together, but you must move over to our house tomorrow."

"What do you mean? To your house? Very well, I'm willing."

"Yes, you'll lodge with us. We've got an attic, it's vacant now. We had an old lady, a gentlewoman, staying with us, but now she's moved, and Grandmama, I know,

wants to let it to a young man. I said, 'Why a young man?' and she said, 'Simply because I'm getting on, but don't you imagine I'm trying to make a match for you, Nastenka!' And so I knew at once that that was why."

"Ah Nastenka!"

And we both began to laugh.

"Stop now, stop! And where do you live? I forgot to ask you."

"Over there, near the bridge, in Barannikov's house."

"It's a great big house, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's a great big house."

"Oh I know, it's a fine house, but do leave it and move over to our place as soon as you can."

"As soon as it's morning, Nastenka, as soon as it's tomorrow. I owe a bit of rent, but it doesn't matter. My salary is due shortly."

"You know, I might give lessons: that is, I'll study first and then I'll give lessons."

"Why, that's splendid ... and I'll be getting my gratuity soon, Nastenka."

"So you will be my lodger tomorrow."

"Yes, and we'll go to the *Barber of Seville* because it'll soon be on again."

"Yes, let's," Nastenka said smiling. "But no, I'd rather we went to something else and not the *Barber*."

"Very well, let it be something else; that would be better of course, I'm sorry it never occurred to me."

Talking in this strain we wandered up and down as though we were intoxicated, in a daze it seemed, not knowing what was happening to us. We'd come to a spot and pause there, talking for a long time, or we'd start off walking again and go heaven knows where, we'd laugh again, we'd weep again. Or Nastenka would suddenly want to go home, I dared not keep her but I would want to take her to her very doorstep; off we'd go, and then to our surprise, a quarter of an hour later, we'd find ourselves on the embankment again, sitting on our bench. Or suddenly she'd sigh and tear-drops would glisten in her eyes again, and I'd lose heart, my blood would freeze. But the next moment she was squeezing my hand, pulling me along with her, to walk again, to chat and talk.

"It's time now, it's really time I went home; it must be very late," Nastenka said at

last. "We've been behaving like children long enough."

"True, Nastenka, but I'll never fall asleep now, I shan't go home at all."

"I don't think I'll be able to sleep either, but do take me home."

"Of course!"

"But this time, we really must go home."

"Of course we will."

"Promise? Because, after all, I must return home some time, you know."

"I promise," I replied, laughing.

"Well, come along."

"Let us go."

"Look at the sky, Nastenka, look! It will be a wonderful day tomorrow; look at the moon, look how blue the sky is! Look—that yellow cloud over there is creeping over the moon, look, look! But no, it has moved on. Look now, look!"

But Nastenka was not looking at the cloud, she stood rooted to the spot and said nothing; and then I felt her pressing closely and timidly against me. I felt her hand tremble in mine; I looked at her. She leaned harder on my arm.

A young man walked past us. He stopped abruptly, peered close at us, and walked on. My heart sank.

"Nastenka," I said softly, "who is it, Nastenka?"

"It's he," she whispered, clinging ever closer to me, ever more tremulously. My knees all but gave way.

"Nastenka! Nastenka! It's you!" a voice cried and in a minute the young man was close to us.

Good God, the cry, the start she gave! The way she broke away from my arms and flew towards him.... I stood and watched them, utterly crushed. But she had barely given him her hand, had barely flung herself into his arms, when suddenly she turned to me, she was beside me again as swift as lightning, as the wind, and before I could gather my wits together, she had thrown her arms round my neck and kissed me hard and warmly. Then, without a word to me, she rushed to him again, took his hands in hers and drew him away with her.

I stood for a long time, looking after them. At last they both disappeared from view.

MORNING

Morning marked the end of my nights. It was a miserable day. Rain was falling, tapping sadly on my window; my little room was dark; the sky was overcast. My head ached and reeled; fever was creeping up my limbs.

"Here's a letter for you, sir, the postman's brought it, come through the post it has," Matryona said, standing over me.

"A letter? Who from?" I cried, jumping up from my chair.

"That I wouldn't know, sir, look and see, perhaps it says who it's from."

I broke the seal. It was from her!

"Oh forgive me, forgive me," Nastenka wrote. "I beg you on my bended knees to forgive me! I have deceived both myself and you. It was a dream, a phantom. My heart was wrung with thoughts of you today, forgive me, forgive....

"Do not judge me severely for I have not changed towards you at all; I told you I would love you and I do love you, I more than love you! Oh God! If I could only love the two of you at once! If only you were he!"

"If only he were you!" flashed through my mind.

I remembered your own words, Nastenka!

"What wouldn't I do for you now, God knows it's true! I know you're sad and hurt. I have done you an injury, but you know one soon forgives a grievance if one loves. And you do love me!

"I thank you! I thank you for this love, for it is imprinted in my memory like a sweet dream which stays with you long after your awakening; for I shall always remember the moment when you, with such brotherly candour, opened your heart to me, and so generously accepted the gift of my own broken heart, to care for it, to cherish it and nurse it back to life. If you forgive me, my memory of you will be hallowed by my eternal gratitude to you, a feeling which will never be obliterated from my heart. I shall safeguard this memory, I shall remain true to it, I shall not betray it, I shall not be false to my heart, it is too constant. Only last night, how quickly it flew back to the one it belonged to for ever.

"We shall meet, you will come to see us, you will not forsake us, you will be my

friend, my brother always. And when you see me you will give me your hand, won't you? You will give me your hand, you have forgiven me, haven't you. You do love me as before?

"Oh, do love me, do not forsake me, for I love you so at this moment, for I am worthy of your love, I want to be worthy of your love . . . my dear, dear friend! I am to marry him next week. He came back, in love with me, he had never forgotten me. It will not anger you that I am writing about him. But I want to come to you with him, you will not refuse him your affection, will you?

"Forgive, remember and love your Nastenka."

I read this letter over and over again; I wanted to weep. The letter slipped from my fingers at last, and I buried my face in my hands.

"Dearie, I say, dearie," Matryona spoke.

"What is it?"

"Look, I've swept all the cobwebs away; it's fit for a wedding feast or a party, if you've a mind for one, it's that clean."

I looked at Matryona. She was still a hale and hearty "young" old woman, but all of

a sudden, I don't know why, I fancied she was stooping and senile, her eyes were lustreless and wrinkles creased her face. I don't know why, but suddenly it seemed to me that my room, too, had grown old like Matryona. The ceiling and the walls were tarnished, everything had become dingy, and the cobwebs hung thicker than ever. I don't know why, but when I looked out of the window, I fancied that the house opposite had grown decrepit and dingy as well, that plaster had chipped from the pillars, the cornices were black and cracked, and the bright yellow walls were piebald now.

Perhaps it was because the ray of sunshine, peeping out so unexpectedly, had hidden behind the rain-cloud again, that everything seemed to grow dingy before my eyes once more; or perhaps it was because the vista of all my life to come stretched before me so bleakly and so sadly, and I saw myself the way I am now, exactly fifteen years hence, an aged man, in the same old room, as lonely as ever, with the same old Matryona, who had not grown any brighter with the years.

But that I should brood over my wrongs, Nastenka, never! That I should ever mar

your pure and blissful happiness with a cloud of sorrow, that I should ever bring despair into your heart with a bitter reproach, or wound it with secret pangs of conscience and make it beat with sadness in a moment of rapture, that I should ever crush a single one of those exquisite flowers you wove into your dark curls when you walked up to the altar with him.... Oh never! Never! Let your skies be clear for ever, let your sweet smile be ever bright and untroubled, may you for ever be blessed for that one moment of bliss and happiness you granted another, a lonely and grateful heart!

Good Lord! A whole minute of bliss! Why, isn't it enough, even for a lifetime?...

1848

A FAINT HEART

(A Story)

Under the same roof, on the same fourth floor, in the same apartment, there lived two young colleagues—Arkady Ivanovich Nefedevich and Vasya Shumkov.... The

author naturally feels he owes the reader an explanation why one of the heroes is called by his full name and the other by the diminutive form, if only so that this manner of address should not be considered indecorous or somewhat familiar. But then it would be necessary to begin by explaining and describing the rank, age, title, office, and even the peculiarities of the heroes' characters; and as there are many writers who are wont to begin in just such a manner, the author of the present story has resolved to start with action from the very outset, for the sole purpose of being different from the others (that is, because of his boundless self-esteem, as some perhaps will say). His foreword thus completed, he will begin.

Shumkov came home after five that evening, on New Year's Eve. Arkady Ivanovich, who was lying on his bed, woke up and squinted at his friend with half an eye. He saw that Vasya was wearing his perfectly cut civilian frock-coat and an immaculate shirt-front. This, of course, amazed him. "Now where could Vasya have been like that? And he didn't come home for dinner, either!" Shumkov had, in the meantime, light-

ed a candle, and Arkady Ivanovich guessed at once that his friend was going to wake him up, accidentally, as it were. Indeed, Vasya cleared his throat twice, walked up and down the room once or twice, and finally, as he stopped in the corner by the stove to fill his pipe, he let it slip through his fingers on to the floor, by sheer accident of course. Arkady Ivanovich chuckled inwardly.

"Vasya, you've been wily enough!"

"You're not asleep, Arkasha?"

"Really I can't tell for certain, but it seems to me that I'm not."

"Oh Arkasha! Hello, old chap! Well, brother! Well, brother! You'll never guess what I'm about to tell you!"

"I'm sure I won't. I say, come here."

As if expecting this, Vasya came up at once, though he was quite unprepared for any treachery on the part of Arkady Ivanovich. The latter gripped his hands very deftly, turned him round, pulled him down under and began to "strangle" his victim. This, evidently, gave Arkady Ivanovich, who loved a joke, an immense amount of pleasure.

"Got you!" he shouted. "Got you!"

"Arkasha! Arkasha! What are you doing! Let me go, for heaven's sake let me go! I'll mess up my frock-coat!"

"I don't care; what do you want a frock-coat for? Why are you so credulous that you let yourself be caught? Speak up, where have you been, where did you dine?"

"Arkasha, for heaven's sake, let me go!"

"Where did you dine?"

"But that's just what I want to tell you about!"

"Well, tell me."

"Let me go first."

"Oh no, I won't, I won't let you go until you've told me."

"Arkasha! Arkasha! Don't you see that I can't, that it's quite impossible!" cried Vasya, the feeble one, struggling to free himself from his foe's strong clutches. "There are certain subjects, you know...."

"What subjects?"

"Well the kind that make you lose your dignity if you begin to talk of them the way we are now; it can't be done; it will sound funny, and this matter is not funny at all, it's very serious."

"Oh bother it if it's serious! What'll you

think up next? Tell me something that'll make me laugh, that's what you've got to tell me; I don't want to hear anything that's serious; what sort of a friend would you be then? Answer me, what sort of a friend would you be, eh?"

"Arkasha, I swear I can't!"

"None of your excuses."

"I say, Arkasha!" Vasya began, trying with all his might to put as much dignity as he could into his speech while he lay pinned down on the bed. "Arkasha! I think I'll tell you, but...."

"Go on!"

"Well, I've proposed!"

Without another word, Arkady Ivanovich picked Vasya up in his arms like a child, in spite of the fact that Vasya was not short at all, but rather tall though lean, and began to walk up and down the room, carrying him with great ease and pretending he was rocking a baby.

"See if I don't swaddle you, you future spouse," he kept saying. However, when he saw that Vasya was lying motionless in his arms without uttering a word, Arkady sobered up at once, realizing that he had carried

his joke too far. He put his friend down in the middle of the room and kissed him on the cheek in a most sincere and friendly way.

"You're not angry, Vasya?"

"Arkasha, listen. . . ."

"Make up for New Year."

"I don't mind, you know; but why are you so crazy, you scapegrace, you! I've told you often enough, Arkasha, honestly you're not being funny, not funny at all!"

"Well but you're not angry, are you?"

"Oh, I don't mind; who am I ever angry with? But now you've really hurt me, don't you see?"

"How have I hurt you? How?"

"I was coming to you like a friend, with my heart full, to unbosom myself to you, to tell you of my happiness."

"What happiness? Why don't you tell me about it then?"

"That proposed marriage of mine, you know," Vasya replied with resentment, for he was really somewhat infuriated.

"You! You getting married! Then you meant it?" Arkasha roared at the top of his voice. "No, really . . . why, how is that? And the way he says it, with tears streaming

from his eyes! Vasya, Vasyuk my dear, my dearest boy, don't cry! You really mean it, do you?" and Arkady Ivanovich threw his arms round Vasya again.

"Now do you understand why I was so upset?" Vasya said. "You are good, you are my true friend, I know it. I was coming to share this happiness with you, this rapturous joy of mine, and suddenly I was forced to confess all the happiness in my heart, all this rapture, while struggling across the bed, losing my dignity. You do understand, Arkasha," Vasya continued with a half-laugh, "my position made it grotesque; but in a way I did not belong entirely to myself at that moment, I had not the right to cheapen this matter, had I? It's a good thing you didn't ask me her name then, I swear I'd sooner have let you kill me than make me answer you!"

"But Vasya, why didn't you speak up? You should have told me everything earlier, and then I wouldn't have teased," Arkady Ivanovich cried in genuine despair.

"Oh come now, come! I just mentioned it. You know why I take it all so, don't you—it's because I have a kind heart. That's why it makes me so sad that I wasn't able to tell

it the way I wanted to, to gladden you, to delight you, tell it properly, confess it to you decently. Really, Arkasha, I love you so, if it weren't for you I believe I wouldn't ever marry, or live in this world at all!"

Arkady Ivanovich, exceedingly sensitive by nature, listened to Vasya with tears and laughter both. Vasya was affected similarly. Once again they hugged each other and forgot their differences.

"Now, how did it happen? Tell me about it, Vasya! You must forgive me, old chap, but I'm really stunned, absolutely stunned; I'm quite thunderstruck, honestly! But no, old chap, no, you've made it up, I swear you've made it up, you're fibbing!" Arkady Ivanovich cried and actually threw a look of unfeigned mistrust into Vasya's face, but on seeing in it glowing confirmation of his resolve to marry as soon as possible, he threw himself upon his bed and started turning somersaults in his delight, so that the very walls shook.

"Vasya, come and sit here!" he shouted, his buoyancy stilled at last.

"I really don't know how to begin, old chap, how shall I begin?"

The two friends looked at each other in happy excitement.

"Who is she, Vasya?"

"Artemyev..." uttered Vasya, his voice faint with joy.

"No-o!"

"Oh but I used to talk and talk to you about them, and then I stopped, and you never noticed it. Oh Arkasha, the effort I had to make to conceal it from you; but I was afraid, afraid to put it into words! I believed everything would fall through, and I'm in love you know, Arkasha! Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! Now this is what happened," he went on to say, pausing and stammering in his agitation. "She had a fiancé a year ago, and all of a sudden he was sent off somewhere; I knew him too, he's really good riddance. Well then, he stopped writing altogether, he vanished completely. They waited and waited, wondering what it could mean. Suddenly, four months ago, he came back bringing a wife with him and never set foot in their house. How rude! How mean! But then there's no one to stand up for them. She wept and wept, poor girl, and there I went and fell in love with her ... however, I've been in love

with her for a long time, I've always been in love with her! And so I began to comfort her, I called and called ... and then, I really don't know how it all came about, but she came to love me too; a week ago I could contain myself no longer, I burst into tears, I wept and told her everything, that is, that I loved her—well, everything!... 'I am ready to love you too, Vasily Petrovich,' she said, 'but I am a poor girl, do not play me false; I do not even dare love anyone.' D'you see, Arkady? D'you see?... We became engaged right away; I thought and thought, I thought and thought, I said, 'How shall we tell your mamma?' And she said, 'It is difficult now, we must wait a little'; she was afraid: 'She may not let me marry you now'; and she cried too. And I, without consulting her, went and blurted it out to the old lady today. Lizanka fell on her knees before her, and so did I ... and she gave us her blessing. Arkasha, Arkasha, my dearest friend! We shall all live together. No, I shall never part from you for anything in the world!"

"Vasya, no matter how I try I simply can't believe it, honestly I can't, I swear. Really, I keep fancying something.... Listen, how

can it be that you are going to marry? How was it I didn't know, eh? I'll confess, Vasya, I was thinking of marrying too, old chap; but since you're going to, it doesn't matter! Well, I hope you'll be happy, very happy!"

"Oh Arkasha, I have such a light-hearted, such a delicious feeling now!" said Vasya, getting up and pacing excitedly up and down the room. "Isn't it true? Isn't it true? You do feel the same, don't you? We'll be poor, of course, but we'll be happy; and it's not a vain fancy either: our happiness is not taken out of a book, we shall really be happy, you know!"

"Vasya, listen, Vasya!"

"Yes?" Vasya said, stopping in front of Arkady.

"I have an idea; but truly, I'm even afraid of putting it into words!... You must forgive me, but please dispel my doubts for me. What are you going to live on? You know I'm delighted that you are to be married, of course I'm delighted, I can hardly contain myself, but—what are you going to live on, tell me?"

"Oh goodness gracious, really, Arkasha!" Vasya replied, looking at Nefedevich in profound amazement. "What's the matter with

you? The old woman herself didn't have to think twice when I had put it all clearly to her. How do you think they've been living? They've five hundred a year to keep the three of them, you know; that's all the pension they're receiving for the old man. There's Lizanka, the old woman and a small brother, whose school fees they're paying out of the same money, see how people manage? It's only capitalists like you and me, you know.... Why, think of it, sometimes if it's a good year, my income runs into as much as seven hundred!"

"I say, Vasya, please don't mind, I swear I mean it kindly, I'm only thinking how best not to spoil things for you, but what seven hundred? It's only three."

"Three! And what about Yulian Mastakovich? Forgotten him, have you?"

"Yulian Mastakovich indeed! But it's not a certain thing, you know, old chap! It's not like a fixed salary, where every ruble is like a true friend. Of course Yulian Mastakovich is, well, a great man, I respect him, I understand him even if his position is so high, and, upon my word, I love him, because he likes you and pays you for your work,

whereas he could have had a clerk appointed specially to him, instead of paying you the money, but you must see for yourself, Vasya.... And then again, I'm not talking nonsense, you know, I agree a handwriting as good as yours couldn't be found in the whole of St. Petersburg, I must concede it to you," Nefedevich concluded not without enthusiasm, "but what if, God forbid, you displeased him, what if he were dissatisfied with you, what if his business came to an end, what if he took on someone else, why, any number of things might happen! You know, Yulian Mastakovich may be here one day and gone the next, Vasya...."

"Look here, Arkasha, the way you put it the ceiling might cave in on us now."

"Yes, of course, of course. I was just talking."

"No, listen to me, hear me out, now you see, he couldn't part with me. No, just listen, listen to me. You know I carry out his orders zealously; he's so generous, you know, Arkasha, he gave me fifty silver rubles today!"

"Did he really, Vasya? Was it your gratuity?"

"No fear! It was out of his own pocket. He says, 'Here, you haven't been receiving any money for almost five months now; take it if you like; thank you,' he says, 'thank you, I'm pleased with you. I give you my word! After all, you aren't working for me for nothing,' he says, honestly! That's exactly what he said! Tears just poured down my face, Arkasha! Heavens above!"

"Tell me, Vasya, have you finished copying those papers?"

"No ... I haven't yet."

"Oh Vasya! My angel! What have you done!"

"Look, Arkady, it doesn't matter, I've still two days' time, I'll finish."

"But why haven't you been doing it?"

"There you go, there you go! You look so crushed it wrings my soul and makes my heart ache! Oh well, you are always dampening my spirits like that. Screaming 'he-elp' right away! Just consider for a moment, has anything happened? Well, I'll finish it, I swear I will."

"And if you don't?" Arkady cried, jumping up. "And he's given you the money today! You're intending to marry too ... oh my, oh my!"

"Don't worry, don't worry," Shumkov shouted. "I'm settling down to it this very minute, don't worry!"

"How could you have neglected your duty so, Vasya my dear?"

"Oh Arkasha! How could I sit still? The state I was in! Why, I could hardly keep to my chair in the office; I could hardly contain my feelings, you know.... Goodness gracious! I'll sit up all night now, and tomorrow night, and the night after that and I'll finish it."

"Is there much left?"

"Don't bother me, for heaven's sake don't bother me, keep quiet."

Arkady Ivanovich tiptoed to his bed and sat down; then, suddenly, he sprang up only to sit down again, remembering that he might disturb Vasya, although his agitation was making it very hard for him to sit still, it was obvious that the news had quite overwhelmed him, and his first reaction of delight had not spent itself yet. He glanced at Shumkov, the latter glanced at him; smiling and shaking his finger at him, and then fixing his eyes upon his papers with a dreadful scowl (as if the whole success and pro-

ductivity of his endeavours depended on it). It seemed that he, too, could not yet master his excitement, for he kept changing his pens, fidgeting about in his chair, altering his position, and taking up his writing again; but his hand shook and refused to obey him.

"Arkasha! I've spoken to them about you," he cried suddenly, as if he had only just remembered it.

"Have you?" Arkady cried, "and I was about to ask you that—well?"

"Oh yes, I'll tell you everything afterwards! See, it's my fault, honestly, it quite slipped my mind that I wasn't going to say anything until I'd written four pages, but then I suddenly remembered about you and about them. You know I don't seem able to write at all; I keep thinking of you. . . ." Vasya smiled.

They lapsed into silence.

"Ugh! what a rotten pen!" cried Shumkov, striking the table with his pen in disgust. He picked up another one.

"Vasya! Listen! Just one word."

"What is it? Hurry up and let it be the last time."

"Is there much left?"

"Oh dear!" Vasya winced as if there was nothing in this world more alarming and deadly than this question. "A lot, an awful lot!"

"You know, I have an idea."

"What?"

"Never mind, go on with your writing."

"But what is it? Tell me."

"It's after six now, Vasya old chap!"

Here Nefedevich smiled and gave Vasya a roguish wink that was at the same time somewhat timid, for he was not certain yet what Vasya's reaction to it would be.

"Well, what is it?" Vasya said, stopping his writing altogether, looking straight into Arkady's eyes and even growing pale in his impatience.

"D'you know what?"

"Oh for heaven's sake, what is it?"

"D'you know what? You're excited, you won't be able to do much ... wait, wait, wait—I know, I know—listen!" said Nefedevich, jumping up from his bed eagerly and interrupting Vasya, set upon dismissing any objections the latter might raise. "First of all you've got to calm down, you've got to pull yourself together, haven't you?"

"Arkasha! Arkasha!" Vasya cried as he sprang up from his chair. "I'll sit up all night, honestly I will!"

"Oh no, you won't! You'll only fall asleep towards morning."

"I shan't, I shan't fall asleep."

"No, that won't do, no; of course you'll fall asleep; yes, go to sleep at five. At eight I'll call you. It's a holiday tomorrow: you'll settle down and write all day ... and then the night and, by the way, is there much left for you to do?"

"Here, look! Look!"

Vasya, trembling with joy and anticipation, showed his notebook.

"Here!"

"I say, old chap, it's not much, you know."

"My dear, there's more," said Vasya, looking at Nefedevich very, very humbly, as if it rested with him whether Vasya would be allowed to go out or not.

"How much more?"

"Two ... little pages."

"Well then? Look here, we'll finish it on time, we will, truly!"

"Arkasha!"

"Vasya, listen! This is New Year's Eve, everyone's spending it with their friends and families, you and I are the only homeless, orphaned ones. Ah, Vasenka!" Nefedevich hugged Vasya and crushed him in his bear-like embrace.

"Arkady! That settles it!"

"Vasyuk, I was just going to say it. You see, Vasyuk, you clumsy old thing! Listen, listen! You know...."

Arkady paused with gaping mouth, deprived of speech for joy. Vasya held him by the shoulders, stared into his eyes and moved his lips as if he wanted to finish the sentence for him.

"Well?" Vasya said at last.

"Present me to them today!"

"Arkady, let's go there to tea! D'you know what? We won't even stay to see the New Year in, you know, we'll leave earlier," Vasya cried with genuine inspiration.

"That means two hours, no more, no less!"

"And then we part until after I've finished."

"Vasyuk!"

"Arkady!"

It took Arkady just three minutes to change into his frock-coat. Vasya only tidied him-

self up, because in his zeal to settle down to work, he had quite forgotten to take his frock-coat off when he came home.

They hurried out into the street, one feeling happier than the other. Their way lay from the Petersburg side to Kolomna. Arkady Ivanovich's stride was brisk and energetic, his very walk making it obvious how delighted he was in Vasya's good fortune and his ever mounting happiness. Vasya trotted along with shorter steps, but his bearing was not undignified; quite the contrary, he had never appeared in a more favourable light to Arkady Ivanovich. At that moment, Arkady Ivanovich actually experienced a deeper respect for him, and Vasya's physical defect, of which the reader does not yet know —Vasya was a little lop-sided—which always aroused deep-felt and fond compassion in Arkady's kind heart, now moved him to increasingly tender affection, which Vasya naturally well deserved. Indeed, Arkady Ivanovich was ready to weep for joy, but he controlled himself.

"Where are you going, Vasya? It's nearer this way!" he cried, seeing that Vasya was about to turn down Voznesensky Avenue.

"Shut up, Arkasha, shut up!"

"But it's really nearer this way, Vasya!"

"Arkasha! D'you know what?" Vasya began with an air of mystery, his voice faint with happiness. "D'you know what? I'd like to give Lizanka a little present."

"What will it be?"

"There's a wonderful shop, Madame Laroux's, on the corner here."

"Really!"

"A bonnet, old chap, a bonnet; I saw such a sweet little bonnet today; I inquired: they say the style is called Manon Lescaut—it's heavenly! It's got cerise ribbons, and if it's not too expensive . . . Arkasha, even if it is expensive!"

"You're the greatest poet of all, Vasya, I do declare! Come along then."

They quickened their pace to a run, and two minutes later they entered the shop. They were met by a black-eyed Frenchwoman, with her hair dressed in curls, who instantly, after her very first glance at the customers, became as merry and happy as they were, even happier if that were possible. Vasya was ready to kiss Mme Laroux in his delight.

"Arkasha!" he said in an undertone, glancing in a casual way at all the beautiful and gorgeous things displayed upon little wooden stands on the shop's huge table. "Wonders! The beauty of it all, the beauty! Look at that bit of sweetness over there, for instance, see it?" he whispered, indicating a very pretty bonnet, but not at all the one he wanted to buy, for he had already made his choice from afar, and now he fastened his admiring gaze on *the* bonnet, the unsurpassable bonnet, displayed on the other end of the table. The way he stared at it one would have thought that someone was about to steal it, or that the bonnet itself would fly into the air, simply to elude him.

"That one," said Arkady Ivanovich, indicating another bonnet, "that one is the best, I think."

"Good for you, Arkasha! All the honour to you for it; truly, I'm beginning to feel an extraordinary respect for your taste," said Vasya, mischievously pretending to be sincerely moved by Arkasha's choice. "Your bonnet is charming, but come here, will you!"

"Where is there a better one, old man?"

"Take a look at this one!"

"That one?" said Arkady doubtfully.

But when Vasya, unable to restrain himself any longer, snatched it off the stand, from which it seemed to fly of its own volition as though welcoming such a good buyer after its long wait, and when all its ruches, bows, and laces began to rustle, a sudden cry of admiration burst forth from Arkady Ivanovich's powerful chest. Even Mme Laroux who, maintaining her unquestionable supremacy and excellence in the matter of taste, had remained silent from sheer condescension while the choice of bonnets was under way, now rewarded Vasya with a radiant smile of approval, and everything about her—her look, her gesture and her smile—all said, "Yes! You have guessed it and you deserve the happiness awaiting you."

"You were just being coy, weren't you now?" Vasya cried, all his affection now centred upon the charming bonnet. "You've been hiding on purpose, you little rascal, you darling!" And he kissed it, or rather the air that surrounded it, for he was afraid of touching his treasure.

"Thus true worth and virtue conceals itself," added Arkady delightedly, humorously repeat-

ing a sentence he had read that morning in one witty newspaper. "Well, Vasya, what now?"

"Arkasha! Hurrah! Why, you're witty too, today, you'll cause a *furore*, as they call it, among the ladies, mark my words. Mme Laroux! Mme Laroux!"

"What can I do for you?"

"Dear Madame Laroux!"

Mme Laroux glanced at Arkady Ivanovich and smiled indulgently.

"You can't imagine how I adore you at this moment . . . allow me to kiss you . . ." and Vasya kissed the shopkeeper.

She certainly had to summon all her poise for a moment so as not to lose her dignity with a scamp like Vasya. But I assert that it required all Mme Laroux's innate, genuine affability and graciousness to receive his ecstatic impulse the way she did. She forgave him, and how clever, how graceful was the attitude she adopted in this case! Could one be really angry with Vasya!

"Mme Laroux, what is the price?"

"Five silver rubles," she answered with a smile, her calm restored.

"And that one, Mme Laroux?" asked Arkady Ivanovich, pointing to his choice.

"That one is eight silver rubles."

"Oh but I say! I say! Why, you must agree, Mme Laroux, you must say which one is better, daintier, and sweeter, which one is more your style?"

"That one is costlier, but your choice *c'est plus coquet.*"

"Well then, that is the one we are taking!"

Mme Laroux took a sheet of very, very thin paper, wrapped the bonnet in it, and secured it with a little pin. This seemed to make the paper even lighter and finer than it had been without the bonnet. Vasya picked it all up carefully, scarcely breathing, bowed to Mme Laroux, complimented her, and walked out of the shop.

"I'm a *viveur*, Arkasha, I'm born to be a *viveur*!" cried Vasya, breaking into a short, soundless, nervous laugh as he hurried along, giving a wide berth to the passers-by, suspecting one and all of deliberate intent to crush his precious bonnet.

"Listen, Arkady, listen!" he began a minute later, and there was a ring of something solemn, something unutterably loving in his voice. "Arkady, I'm so happy, so happy!"

"Vasenka! and I, I'm so happy, my dear boy!"

"No, Arkasha, no, your love for me is boundless, I know; but you cannot sense even a hundredth part of what I feel just now! My heart is so full, Arkasha, so full! I am unworthy of this happiness! I can hear it, I can feel it! What have I ever done to deserve it," he said in a voice that shook with suppressed sobs. "What have I done, tell me! Look at all the people, look how much sorrow there is, how many tears, how many humdrum days with never a holiday! And I! I am loved by such a girl, I... but you will see her for yourself, you will appreciate that noble heart of hers yourself. I am of low birth, but now I have a rank and an independent income—my salary, that is. I was born with a physical defect—my shoulders are slightly crooked. But look, she loves me as I am. And Yulian Mastakovich, too, was so nice, so considerate, so polite to me today. He seldom talks to me; he came up and said, 'Well, Vasya (honestly, that's what he called me, just Vasya), going on the spree during the holidays, eh?' and he laughed. 'It's like this, Your Excellency,' I said, 'I have some work to do,' and then I

plucked up courage and said, 'and perhaps I'll have a little pleasure, too, Your Excellency,'—I swear I said it. And then he gave me the money and added another word or two. I wept, honestly I was reduced to tears, and I think he was moved, too, he patted me on the shoulder and said, 'That's the way, Vasya, you should always feel like this.'"

For a second Vasya paused; Arkady Ivanovich turned away and wiped a tear with his fist.

"And then, and then..." Vasya went on, "I have never said this to you before, Arkady... Arkady! You make me so happy with your friendship, I wouldn't be alive at all if it weren't for you—no, no, don't say a word, Arkasha! Let me shake your hand, let me thank you!" and again Vasya was unable to go on.

Arkady Ivanovich wanted to hug Vasya then and there as they were crossing the street but suddenly a shrill cry of "hey—look out!" rang practically in their ears, and, frightened and excited, they ran to the safety of the pavement. This was rather a relief to Arkady Ivanovich. He ascribed Vasya's gushing avowals of gratitude to nothing but the singularity of

the present moment. As for himself, he was chagrined. He felt that so far he had done so little for Vasya! He actually felt ashamed of himself when Vasya began to thank him for the little he had done. But then there was a whole lifetime ahead, and Arkady Ivanovich breathed easier.

Their hosts had indeed given up waiting for them! There was the proof—they were already having tea. But truly, an elderly soul is shrewder at times than a young one, and what a young one at that! Because Lizanka had insisted quite earnestly that he would not come: 'He isn't coming, Mamma, I can feel it in my heart he isn't'; while her Mamma kept saying that her heart was telling her quite the opposite, that he would be sure to come, that he wouldn't be able to stay away, that he would come running, that no one had any office duties at that hour, on New Year's Eve, too! And when Lizanka went to open the front door, even then she never expected to see them —she could not believe her eyes, she was breathless, her heart fluttered suddenly like a little captured bird's, she blushed all over, she grew red like a cherry, which she resembled awfully. Good Lord, what a surprise! What

a joyful "Oh!" escaped her lips! "You faithless one! You darling!" she cried, flinging her arms around Vasya's neck. But imagine her amazement, all her sudden embarrassment: directly behind Vasya, as if trying to hide behind his back, stood Arkady Ivanovich, looking slightly abashed. It must be admitted that he was indeed awkward with women, very awkward, it even happened once that.... But of that anon. However, you must consider his position too: there was nothing to laugh at; there he stood in the hall, in his galoshes, his topcoat and fur cap, which he made haste to pull off, bundled up in a most horrible way in the meanest of yellow knitted mufflers, knotted behind for greater effect. All this had to be unwound, removed as quickly as possible, so that he could appear in a more favourable light, for there is no one in the world who does not wish to present himself in a more favourable light. And then Vasya, annoying, impossible, though of course the same dear, kind Vasya, but really an impossible, pitiless Vasya, cried, "Here, Lizanka, here's my Arkady for you! What d'you think of him, eh? This is my best friend, embrace and kiss him, Lizanka, give him a kiss in advance, when you

know him better you'll want to kiss him yourself." Well then? Well then, I'm asking you, what could Arkady Ivanovich do? And so far he had only managed to unwind half the length of his muffler! Truly, sometimes I feel actually ashamed of Vasya's excessive enthusiasm; it shows that he's kind-hearted, of course, but... it's embarrassing, it's unnecessary!

At last they both entered. The old lady was overjoyed to make the acquaintance of Arkady Ivanovich: she had heard so much about him.... But she did not finish. A happy "Oh" which rang out in the room, made her break off in the middle of a sentence. Oh joy! Lizanka was standing before the bonnet so unexpectedly revealed by the wrapping, her pretty hands clasped most naïvely, and her lips smiling, smiling so.... Oh my goodness, why couldn't Mme Laroux have had an even better bonnet to offer!

But, good Lord, where could you find a better bonnet? That's really overstepping all bounds! Where will you find a better one? I mean it quite seriously. And I should even say that this lovers' ingratitude makes me somewhat indignant, it actually grieves me a

little. But look for yourselves, look, what could be better than this darling of a bonnet? Do look.... But no, no, my complaints are uncalled for: they all agree with me now; it was nothing but a momentary delusion, a daze, a fever of emotion; I am willing to forgive them. But then look... you must forgive me, I'm still on the subject of the bonnet; it's a tulle one, feather-light, a wide cerise ribbon, draped with lace, set in between the crown and the ruching, with two ends of the ribbon, long and wide, coming down at the back; they'll fall on the neck, a little lower than the nape.... Only the bonnet itself has to be worn further back on the head; do look; do look and tell me now.... Oh but I see, you're not looking!... You don't seem to care! You're gazing in another direction. You are watching two great, pearl-like tear-drops suddenly gather in a pair of coal-black eyes, quiver a moment on the long eyelashes, and then vanish into the airy froth which, rather than tulle, is what Mme Laroux's work of art is made of.... And I feel aggrieved again: it's almost as if the tears were not quite for the bonnet!... Oh no! In my opinion, a thing like that should be given in cold blood. Only then can it be duly

appreciated. I'm all for the bonnet, I must confess!

They sat down—Vasya next to Lizanka, and the old lady next to Arkady Ivanovich; they conversed and Arkady Ivanovich acquitted himself well. I gladly give him the credit. Indeed, I hardly expected it of him. After a word or two about Vasya, he managed to turn the conversation most adroitly to Yulian Mastakovich, his benefactor. And he spoke so cleverly, that in truth, the subject did not wear thin in a whole hour. The wisdom, the tact with which Arkady Ivanovich touched upon certain of his peculiarities, which directly or indirectly concerned Vasya, was worth watching. But then the old lady was charmed, truly charmed; she herself admitted it, she made a point of calling Vasya aside and telling him that his friend was a splendid, a most courteous young man, and what was more, such a serious, sedate young man. Vasya all but burst out laughing with the blessedness of it all. He remembered how the sedate Arkasha had wrestled with him on the bed not half an hour ago! The old lady then made a sign to Vasya and told him to follow her quietly and stealthily into the other room. It must be said

that she was acting a little meanly towards Lizanka: she was betraying her trust from the fullness of her heart, of course, when she let Vasya steal a look at the gift which Lizanka was making him for New Year. This was a wallet, embroidered with beads and gold thread, and beautifully designed: there was a deer on one side, perfectly true to life, running very swiftly and so naturally, so well! The other side portrayed a well-known general, perfectly done too, and finished off to quite a good likeness. There's no need for me to speak of Vasya's delight. Meanwhile, the moment was not wasted in the sitting-room either. Lizanka straightaway approached Arkady Ivanovich. She took both his hands in hers, she thanked him for something and finally Arkady Ivanovich understood that the matter concerned the very same precious Vasya. Indeed, Lizanka was deeply moved: she had heard that Arkady Ivanovich was such a true friend to her betrothed, that he was so fond of him, watched over him so, guided him at every step with salutary advice, that really, she, Lizanka, could not but thank him, could not contain her feeling of gratitude, and hoped that Arkady Ivanovich would grow to love her too, if only

half as much as he loved Vasya. Then she went on to ask him whether Vasya was taking good care of his health, she voiced certain misgivings about his exceptionally hot temper, his imperfect knowledge of people and life, and said that in time she would look after him religiously, she would cherish him and watch over his destiny, and that she hoped Arkady Ivanovich, far from abandoning them, would even make his home with them.

"The three of us will be like one!" she cried in very naïve elation.

But it was time they left. They were of course urged to stay, but Vasya declared quite firmly that they could not. Arkady Ivanovich seconded his avowal. They were naturally asked why, and it was immediately disclosed that there was a piece of work entrusted to Vasya by Yulian Mastakovich, an urgent, important, and horrible job, which had to be submitted the day after tomorrow in the morning, and that far from being finished, it was hopelessly behindhand. Mamma gasped when she heard of this, while Lizanka was frankly upset and alarmed and actually drove Vasya away. Their parting kiss did not suffer for it

at all: it was shorter and swifter, but for all that—warmer and harder.

They parted at last, and the two friends hastened home.

The minute they found themselves out in the street, they began with one accord to confide their impressions to each other. But this was as it should be: Arkady Ivanovich was in love, head over heels in love with Lizanka! And who was a better confidant for this than Vasya, the luckiest of mortals himself? That was what he did: without a qualm he instantly confessed it all to Vasya. Vasya thought it terribly amusing and was awfully glad, and even remarked that it was all for the better, that now they'd be closer friends than ever. "You've read my thoughts, Vasya," Arkady Ivanovich said. "Yes! I love her as I love you! She will be my guardian angel as well as yours, for your happiness will shed a radiance upon me too, and warm me with its rays. She will be mistress of my fate too, Vasya: my happiness will be in her hands, let her command both you and me alike. Yes, my friendship for you is my friendship for her. You two are inseparable for me now; only now I shall have two beings like you instead of

one. . . ." Arkady broke off, overwhelmed with emotion, while Vasya was shaken to the depths of his soul by his friend's words. Never had he expected to hear words like these from Arkady! He was not an eloquent speaker at all, neither was he fond of dreaming; and yet now he instantly began to weave the gayest, the brightest, and the most blissful of day-dreams! "Oh, how I'll look after you both, how I shall cherish you," he spoke again. "First of all, Vasya, I shall stand godfather to all your children, every single one of them, and secondly, Vasya, we've got to think of the future. We must buy some furniture, rent a flat, so that she and you and I should all have our private cubby-holes. You know, Vasya, I'll run around and take a look at the 'To Let' signs tomorrow. Three . . . no, two rooms, we don't need more. Come to think of it, I was talking nonsense earlier today, Vasya, we'll have enough money, never fear! The minute I glanced into her pretty eyes I knew at once that we'd have enough. Everything for her! Phew, how hard we'll work! Now, Vasya, we can risk it and pay, say, twenty-five rubles for a flat. A flat means everything, old chap! In good rooms . . . you know, a man feels light-

hearted and his dreams are blissful! And secondly, Lizanka will be our common treasurer, not a kopek wasted! D'you think I'd ever drop into a bar now? What do you take me for? Not on your life! And then we'll get a raise, we'll receive gratuities, because we'll work with zeal. My! how hard we'll work! We'll plough through it like oxen! Just think now," and Arkady Ivanovich's voice grew faint with rapture, "a sudden windfall of some twenty-five or thirty rubles!... You know every gratuity will mean a bonnet, or a scarf or stockings or something! She simply must knit me a muffler, look how wretched mine is—yellow, disgusting, the unpleasantness it caused me today! And you're a good one, too, Vasya, presenting me while I stood with that yoke on my neck... but that's not the point at all! It's this: you see, I'm taking it upon myself to provide all the silver! I'm bound to make you a little gift, you know, it's an honour, it's a question of self-esteem! My gratuity won't run away from me, will it, they wouldn't give it to Skorokhodov instead; no chance of the money going stale in that bird's pocket! Look here, I'll buy you some silver spoons and some good knives—not silver ones, but the very best

knives, and a waistcoat, that is the waistcoat is for me, I'll be your best man, you know! Only you've got to try hard now, take hold of yourself, I'll stand over you with a stick to-night and tomorrow night, all night long, I'll work you to death, but you must finish it! Get it finished quickly! And then we'll go out for the evening again, and we'll both be happy. We'll take a fling at lotto! We'll sit together of an evening—my, what fun! Oh bother, what a pity I can't be a help to you. I'd gladly sit down and write it all, all of it for you. Why don't you and I write the same hand?"

"Yes," said Vasya, "yes, I must hurry. It must be about eleven now, I think. I must hurry.... To work!" and saying this, Vasya, who all this time had either been smiling or breaking into this effusion of good-will with some eager remark and, in short, had been displaying the most whole-hearted animation, suddenly grew subdued and silent, and started down the street almost at a run. It seemed that some oppressive thought had suddenly turned his flaming mind to ice, and was tugging at his heart.

It quite worried Arkady Ivanovich: his anxious questions elicited hardly any replies

from Vasya, who only tossed back a word or two, or an exclamation which was often irrelevant.

"But, Vasya, what's wrong with you?" he shouted at last, hard put to catch up with Vasya. "Can it be worrying you so?"

"Oh stop babbling, old man," Vasya replied in some annoyance.

"Come, Vasya, don't lose heart," Arkady broke in, "why, I've seen you write much more in a shorter time... what's it for you! You've just got a gift for it! If it comes to that, you can even try and write faster. They're not going to have it lithographed for calligraphy books you know! You'll manage! The only thing is you're excited and preoccupied now, and the work will go slower for it."

Vasya either said nothing or muttered something under his breath, and the two came running up to their home in a state of real alarm.

Vasya sat down to his work at once. Arkady Ivanovich, meek and silent, quietly undressed and lay down on his bed, keeping his eyes fixed on Vasya all the while. A strange fear took possession of him. "What's the matter with him?" he asked himself as he

watched Vasya's blanched face, his glittering eyes and the anxiety which showed in his every gesture. "His hand is shaking too ...oh bother, really! Perhaps I should advise him to go to bed for an hour or two? At least he'd sleep off his agitation." Vasya had just then finished a page and, raising his eyes, he glanced at Arkady, but he dropped his eyes at once and picked up his pen again.

"I say, Vasya," Arkady Ivanovich said all of a sudden. "Wouldn't it be better if you had a little nap? Look, you're quite feverish."

Vasya looked at Arkady with annoyance, even malice, and made no reply.

"Listen Vasya, what are you doing to yourself?"

Vasya responded at once.

"Maybe we should have some tea, Arkasha?" he said.

"Why? What for?"

"It will brace me up. I don't want to sleep, no, I shan't sleep! I'll keep on writing. I'd rest a little at tea, and things would go easier."

"Smart of you, Vasya old chap, marvellous! You said the very words; I was going

to suggest that you take a rest. But why didn't I think of the tea myself? Only you know what? Mavra won't get up, she won't wake up for anything."

"Hm."

"Rubbish! Never mind!" cried Arkady Ivanovich, jumping down from his bed in his bare feet. "I'll put the samovar on myself. It won't be the first time, will it!"

Arkady Ivanovich hurried to the kitchen and busied himself with the samovar. In the meantime Vasya kept on writing. Arkady Ivanovich went so far as to dress and run to the baker's shop, so that Vasya could fortify himself for the night's work. A quarter of an hour later the samovar was on the table. They sat down to tea, but conversation flagged. Vasya was still preoccupied.

"I must go the rounds and pay my New Year respects tomorrow..." Vasya said at last, as though recalling himself to the present.

"You needn't go at all."

"No, old chap, I must," said Vasya.

"But I'll sign your name for you everywhere ... why should you go? You'd better do your work tomorrow. I told you you ought

to stay up till about five in the morning, and then you could go to sleep. Think what a sight you'll look if you don't! I'd rouse you at eight sharp."

"But will it be all right for you to sign my name?" said Vasya, half-inclined to agree.

"Why not? Everyone does it!"

"I'm afraid, really."

"But what are you afraid of? What?"

"It doesn't matter with the others, you know, but Yulian Mastakóvich, he's my benefactor, Arkasha. What if he notices it's a different hand?"

"He'd notice! Bah! You are a one, Vasyuk! How could he possibly notice it? Don't you know I can sign your name ever so well and I make the same curlicue, honestly I do! Come now, how could anyone know the difference?"

Vasya said nothing and hurried through his tea.... Then he shook his head in doubt.

"Vasya, my dear! Oh if we can only do it! Vasya, but what is it? You're really frightening me! D'you know I shan't go to bed now, Vasya, I shan't go to sleep. Show me, is there much left?"

Vasya gave him such a glare that Arkady Ivanovich's heart sank and words failed him.

"Vasya! What is the matter? What is it? Why do you look like that?"

"Arkady, I really think I'll go and pay my respects to Yulian Mastakovich tomorrow."

"Well, perhaps you should," Arkady said, staring at him in an agony of suspense. "Listen, Vasya, write faster; I wouldn't advise you ill. I swear I wouldn't! Remember how often Yulian Mastakovich himself said that the thing he liked best about your penmanship was its legibility. It's only Skoroplyokhin, you know, who wants it to be distinct and beautiful as well, like a calligraphy book, so he might pinch the paper somehow afterwards and take it home for his children to copy; as if he couldn't buy them some copybooks, the fool! And as for Yulian Mastakovich, all he says, all he demands is: clearness, clearness, and clearness! What more do you want? Really, Vasya, I don't know how to talk to you any more.... I'm even afraid.... You're killing me with your despondency."

"Never mind, never mind!" Vasya uttered, and fell back in his chair in exhaustion. Arkady was alarmed.

"D'you want some water? Vasya! Vasya!"

"Don't worry, don't," Vasya said, pressing his hand. "I'm all right; I only felt a sort of sadness, Arkady. I can't even tell why. Listen, do talk of something else, don't remind me. . . ."

"Compose yourself, for heaven's sake compose yourself, Vasya! You'll finish it, honestly you will! And even if you don't what matter? It's not a crime, you know!"

"Arkady," said Vasya with a look so wrought with meaning that Arkady felt positively frightened, for never before had Vasya been so dreadfully upset. "If I were alone, as before. . . . No, that's not what I wanted to say. I keep wanting to tell you, to confide in you like a friend. However, why should I worry you? You see, Arkady, some are capable of great things, and others do their little bit like me. Now supposing you were expected to show gratitude and appreciation and you were unable to do it?"

"Vasya! I don't understand you at all!"

"I've never been ungrateful," Vasya con-

tinued softly, as though deliberating with his own self. "But if I cannot express all I feel, it's as if ... it will seem that I'm really ungrateful, Arkady, and it's killing me!"

"Oh come, come! Surely it can't be that all your gratitude hinges on is whether you finish your work on time or not? Think what you're saying, Vasya! Is that the only proof of gratitude?"

Vasya said no more and suddenly gave Arkady a clear-eyed stare, as if all his doubts had been dispelled by this unexpected reasoning. He even smiled, but instantly assumed the same pensive expression again. Arkady was quite overjoyed, interpreting this smile as the end of all his fears, and the anxious expression that reappeared on Vasya's face as his determination to do better.

"Well, Arkasha, when you wake up take a look at me," Vasya said, "there'll be the devil to pay if I fall asleep; and now I'll settle down to work.... Arkasha?"

"Yes?"

"No, it's nothing, I only wanted ... I wanted...."

Vasya sat down and said no more. Arkady went to bed. Neither of them uttered a word

about their friends in Kolomna. It may be that both of them were conscious of being a little guilty, that their spree had been untimely. Arkady Ivanovich soon fell asleep, still grieving over Vasya. To his surprise he awoke when it was just past seven. Vasya was asleep in his chair, pen in hand, pale and exhausted; the candle had burnt out. Mavra could be heard fussing with the samovar in the kitchen.

"Vasya! Vasya!" Arkady shouted in alarm. "When did you go to sleep?"

Vasya opened his eyes and jumped up.

"Goodness!" he gasped. "I dropped off in my chair!"

He pounced on his papers at once—they were in order; there was neither ink nor candle grease blots on them.

"I suppose I must have dropped off at about six," Vasya said. "How cold it is at night! Let's have some tea and then I'll resume."

"Do you feel better now?"

"Yes, yes, it's all right, it's all right...."

"Happy New Year, Vasya old chap!"

"Happy New Year! Same to you, my dear boy!"

They embraced. Vasya's chin quivered and his eyes grew moist. Arkady Ivanovich was silent; he was feeling sad; they hurried through their tea....

"Arkady! I've made up my mind, I'll go to Yulian Mastakovich myself."

"But he won't notice, you know."

"My conscience won't let me be, old chap."

"But it's for him you're sitting here, it's for him you're worrying yourself sick ... come now! You know, old chap, I'll drop in there today."

"Where?" Vasya asked.

"The Artemyevs. I'll wish them a happy New Year from both of us."

"Oh my dearest friend! Very well; I'll stay here; I see now that you were right; after all I'm busy working. I'm not just idling my time away! Wait a moment, I'll quickly write a note."

"Go ahead, you've got plenty of time, you needn't hurry. I still have to wash and shave and brush my coat. Well, Vasya old chap, we are going to be pleased and happy! Embrace me, Vasya!"

"Oh if only...."

"Does Mr. Shumkov live here?" a child's voice sounded from the staircase.

"He does, my dear, he does," Mavra said as she admitted the visitor.

"Who's that? What is it?" cried Vasya, leaping from his chair, and dashing into the hall. "Petenka, you!"

"Good morning. I have the honour of wishing you a happy New Year, Vasily Petrovich," said a pretty little boy of ten or so, with his dark hair done up in ringlets. "Sister sends you her regards and Mamma too, and sister told me to kiss you for her."

Vasya swung the messenger up into the air and planted a long, honeyed and ecstatic kiss on his lips, which were so very much like Lizanka's.

"Kiss him, Arkady!" he said, handing Petya over to Arkady, and the boy, without touching the floor, passed on into the powerful and eager arms of Arkady Ivanovich.

"Oh you darling boy, would you like some tea?"

"Thank you kindly. We've had tea already. We got up early today. They've gone to morning service. Sister spent two hours curling my hair and pomading it, wash-

have never done a kindness to anyone in the world, to no one at all, because I was incapable of doing it—my very appearance is unpleasant. And yet everyone has been kind to me! First of all—you! As if I didn't see it. But I only kept silent, that's all!"

"Vasya, don't!"

"Why not, Arkasha? Why not? I'm just..." Vasya spoke with difficulty through his tears. "I told you about Yulian Mastakovich yesterday. You know as well as I do how strict and stern he is, he's even found fault with you more than once, and yet with me he was cheerful and affectionate yesterday, and he revealed to me the kindness of his heart which he so sensibly conceals from everyone."

"There you are, Vasya! It only goes to show that you deserve your happiness."

"Oh Arkasha! How much I wanted to finish all this work! No, I know I'll wreck my own happiness! I have a premonition. Oh no, not because of this," Vasya said, intercepting the oblique look Arkady gave the stacks of urgent work lying on the table, "that's nothing, it's just a lot of paper ... rubbish! That's a settled matter. I ... Arkasha, I was

there today, at their place. I didn't go in, you know. I felt depressed and bitter! I only stood outside their door for a while. She was playing the piano, I listened. You see, Arkady," he said, pitching his voice low, "I did not have the courage to go in."

"I say, Vasya, what's wrong with you? Why do you look at me like that?"

"What? Oh, nothing! I feel rather faint, my legs are shaking; it's because I sat up all night. Now everything is going green before my eyes. It's here, here...."

He pressed his hand to his heart. He fainted.

When Vasya regained consciousness, Arkady was ready to take forcible measures. He tried to make him go to bed, but Vasya refused absolutely. He cried, he wrung his hands, he wanted to write, he was resolved to finish his two pages. Not to provoke him further, Arkady allowed him to do so.

"You see," Vasya said, settling down in his chair, "you see I have an idea too. There is hope."

He smiled at Arkady and his pale face actually seemed to light up with a ray of hope.

"Listen: I won't take it all to him the day after tomorrow. I'll lie about the rest, I'll tell

him it got burned, or wet, or lost ... or that I haven't finished it, I cannot tell a lie. I'll explain it all to him myself, you know what? I'll explain everything to him, I'll say it was this way, I couldn't ... I'll tell him about my love; after all he's only been married a short while himself, he'll understand. Needless to say I'll go about it in a deferential and quiet way; he'll see my tears, they'll move him."

"Yes, of course, go to him, go and explain ... and there's no need to cry at all! What for? Really, Vasya, you've quite frightened me too."

"Yes, I'll go, I'll go. And now, let me write, let me write, Arkasha. I'll do no harm, just let me write!"

Arkady threw himself on the bed. He did not trust Vasya, he did not trust him at all. Vasya was liable to do anything. But to go and seek forgiveness—for what? How? That was not the point. The point was that Vasya had failed to perform his duty, that Vasya felt guilty towards himself, he felt he was being ungrateful to his lucky stars, he was crushed and stunned by his happiness and considered himself unworthy of it, he was only using this as a good excuse to pent his

feelings on, whereas he had not yet recovered from his surprise of yesterday. "That's what it is!" Arkady Ivanovich thought. "He must be saved. He must be reconciled with himself. He's singing his own requiem." He thought and thought and made up his mind to go to Yulian Mastakovich at once, as soon as it was morning, and tell him everything.

Vasya was sitting and writing. Arkady Ivanovich, worn out, lay down in order to think the matter over again, and when he awoke it was almost daylight.

"Oh hell! Again!" he cried as he looked at Vasya, who was busy writing.

Arkady rushed to him, grasped him in his arms and forcefully put him to bed. Vasya smiled, his eyes closed from weakness. He could hardly talk.

"I meant to go to bed," he said. "D'you know, Arkady, I have an idea: I'll finish. I've made myself hurry. I could not have sat up longer. Wake me up at eight."

His words trailed off and he fell into a dead sleep.

"Mavra!" Arkady Ivanovich whispered to Mavra who came in with their tea. "He asked to be called in an hour. Most definitely

no! Let him sleep ten hours longer if he wants to, understand?"

"I understand, sir, I do."

"Don't make dinner, don't bother with the firewood, don't make a sound or there'll be trouble! If he asks about me, tell him I've gone to the office, understand?"

"I understand, sir, I do; let him sleep his fill, what's it to me? I like my masters to sleep well, and I take good care of my masters' things, too. That cup I broke the other day, the one you scolded me about, it wasn't me, it was the cat that did it; I don't know how she did it; off with you, you blasted cat, I said."

"Sh! shut up, shut up!"

Arkady Ivanovich ushered Mavra out into the kitchen, demanded the key of the door and locked her in. After that he went to his office. On the way there he thought of the best way to approach Yulian Mastakovich, wondering whether it would be fitting and not too audacious of him. He felt timid when he reached the office, and timidly inquired if His Excellency was in; he was told that he was not, and would not come in that day. Arkady Ivanovich wanted to go to his resi-

dence at once, but it occurred to him most opportunely that if Yulian Mastakovich had not come to the office, he must be engaged in some pressing business at home. Arkady Ivanovich remained at the office. The hours seemed endless to him. He surreptitiously tried to gather information about the work entrusted to Shumkov. But no one knew anything at all. All they knew was that Yulian Mastakovich charged him with special commissions, but what exactly they were, no one could tell. At last the clock struck three and Arkady Ivanovich rushed home. One of the clerks stopped him in the hall and told him that Vasily Petrovich Shumkov had come in some time after twelve and asked whether Arkady Ivanovich was there and whether Yulian Mastakovich had come. On hearing this, Arkady Ivanovich hired a carriage and drove to his flat, beside himself with alarm.

Shumkov was in. He was pacing the floor in extreme agitation. With a glance at Arkady Ivanovich he instantly seemed to pull himself together and compose himself, and hastened to conceal his agitation. He sat down to his work in silence. It seemed he was

trying to evade his friend's questions, was vexed by them and was determined to keep to himself some decision he had come to, for even friendship could no longer be relied on. This astonished Arkady and his heart was rent with a distressing, piercing pain. He sat down on his bed and opened his book at random, the only one he possessed, never taking his eyes off his poor friend. But Vasya remained stubbornly silent, he went on writing and did not look up. This continued for several hours, and Arkady's anguish rose to a pitch. At last, at about ten o'clock, Vasya raised his head and fixed a dull, stony look on Arkady. Arkady did not move. Two or three minutes went by: Vasya remained numb. "Vasya!" Arkady cried. Vasya did not respond. "Vasya!" he called again, springing from his bed. "Vasya, what's the matter with you? What is it?" he shouted running to him. Vasya raised his head and once again fixed the same dull, stony stare on him. "He's got the palsy!" Arkady thought, shaking with fear. He grabbed the water jug, propped Vasya up higher in the chair, poured some water on his head, moistened his temples, and rubbed his hands between his own. Vasya

came back to his senses. "Vasya! Vasya!" Arkady cried out, no longer checking his tears. "Vasya, don't wreck your life, remember! Remember!" He could not go on and only held him close in his arms. Some painful emotion passed across Vasya's face; he rubbed his forehead and clutched at his head as if afraid it might burst.

"I don't know what's wrong with me!" he said at last. "I think I've overstrained myself. Oh well! Come, Arkady, don't take on so, don't!" he repeated, looking at Arkady with sad, tired eyes. "What's there to worry about? Come!"

"Vasya, *you* comforting me!" Arkady cried, his heart breaking. "Vasya," he said at last, "lie down, try to sleep a little, eh? Don't torment yourself needlessly. You'll get down to your work again afterwards."

"Yes, yes," Vasya kept saying, "have it your own way. I'll lie down; all right; yes, you see I was going to finish it but I've changed my mind now, yes. . . ."

Arkady drew him towards the bed.

"Listen, Vasya," he said firmly, "we've got to settle this matter once and for all! Tell me, what's preying on your mind?"

"Oh!" Vasya waved a limp hand and turned his face away.

"Come, Vasya, come! You must tell me! I don't want to be your murderer: I can't remain silent any longer. You won't be able to fall asleep unless you've told me first, I know."

"As you like, as you like," Vasya said enigmatically.

"He's succumbing," thought Arkady Ivanovich.

"Take my advice, Vasya," he said, "remember what I said to you, I'll save you tomorrow, I'll settle your fate for you tomorrow! Oh, but what am I saying: fate! You have frightened me so, Vasya, that I'm beginning to speak the way you do. Fate, indeed! It's sheer rubbish, nonsense! You don't want to lose Yulian Mastakovich's favour or —if you like to put it that way—his affection, that's what it is! And you won't lose it, you'll see I . . . I. . . ."

Arkady Ivanovich would have talked much longer, but Vasya cut him short. He raised himself in bed, hugged Arkady close, and kissed him.

"Don't," he said faintly, "don't! don't say

any more!" And he turned his face to the wall again.

"Oh God!" Arkady thought. "Oh God! What is it? He's utterly lost; what has he decided to do? He'll kill himself!"

Arkady looked at him in despair.

"If he fell ill," Arkady was thinking, "it would be for the better perhaps. His anxiety would pass with his illness and by then the matter would have been settled most satisfactorily. Oh, but I'm raving! Oh, good God in heaven!"

Meanwhile, Vasya seemed to fall into a doze. Arkady Ivanovich was relieved. "A good sign," he thought. He decided to sit up with Vasya all night. Vasya was restless, he tossed and turned, he jerked up nervously, and opened his eyes for fleeting moments. At last his fatigue got the better of him; he seemed to fall into a dead sleep. It was about two in the morning; Arkady Ivanovich dozed off in his chair, with his elbow resting on the table.

His sleep was fitful and strange. He fancied that he was not asleep at all and that Vasya was lying on the bed as before. But how odd! It seemed to him that Vasya was pre-

tending, that he was actually deceiving him, that there he was cautiously getting up, watching him with narrowed eyes, and was stealing towards the table. A searing pain pierced Arkady's heart; it wounded, saddened, and depressed him to see that Vasya no longer trusted him, that he was holding something back from him. He tried to call to him, to clasp him in his arms and carry him back to bed. But Vasya cried out, and it was his cold, dead body he was bearing back to bed. Cold beads of sweat stood out on Arkady's brow, his heart beat wildly. He opened his eyes and was wide awake. Vasya was sitting at the table, writing.

Not believing his senses, Arkady glanced at the bed: Vasya was not there. Arkady sprang to his feet in alarm, still under the influence of his dream. Vasya never stirred. He kept on writing. To his horror, Arkady suddenly noticed that there was no ink on the pen Vasya was running over the paper, that the pages he was turning over were perfectly clean, and he was hurrying, hurrying to cover the pages, as if he were performing his task with great efficiency and success. "No, it isn't the palsy," Arkady Iva-

novich thought, and his whole frame shook. "Vasya, Vasya, talk to me!" he shouted, gripping Vasya's shoulder. But Vasya remained silent and continued writing with his dry pen.

"At last I am writing faster," he muttered, without looking up at Arkady.

Arkady caught Vasya's hand and pulled away the pen.

Vasya groaned from the depths of his heart. He dropped his hand and raised his eyes to Arkady, then he brushed his hand across his forehead with a gesture of weary vexation, as if he wanted to push away some heavy, leaden weight that was bearing down upon his entire being, and then he dropped his head on his breast, slowly and pensively, it seemed.

"Vasya! Vasya!" Arkady Ivanovich cried in despair. "Vasya!"

A minute passed before Vasya looked up at him. His large blue eyes were filled with tears, and his wan, gentle face expressed infinite anguish. He whispered something.

"What? What did you say?" Arkady cried, bending over him.

"What have I done? What have I done to

deserve it?" Vasya was whispering. "What for? What have I done to deserve it?"

"Vasya! Speak to me! What's frightening you, Vasya, what is it?" Arkady cried, wringing his hands in despair.

"Why are they sending me into the army?" said Vasya, looking straight into his friend's eyes. "What for? What have I done?"

Arkady's hair stood on end: he refused to believe it. He was utterly crushed. But in a minute he recovered. "It's nothing, it will pass," he said to himself, his face pale and his bloodless lips trembling. He hastily put on his clothes. He wanted to run and fetch a doctor. Suddenly Vasya called to him; Arkady darted to him and held him close, like a mother whose child is being torn away from her.

"Arkady, Arkady, don't tell anyone! You hear me, it's my own misfortune! Let me be the only one to suffer."

"Why Vasya, collect yourself, think what you're saying!"

Vasya sighed, and tears slowly coursed down his cheeks.

"But why should they kill her? For what? How is she to blame?" he muttered in a tor-

tured, heart-rending voice. "It's my crime, my crime!..."

He was silent a moment.

"Good-bye, my beloved! Good-bye, my beloved!" he whispered, shaking his poor head. Arkady shuddered, started, and turned to rush out for the doctor. "Let's go! It's time!" Vasya cried, aroused by Arkady's sudden movement. "Let us go, old chap, let's go; I am ready! You take me there!" he broke off and glanced at Arkady with a stricken and mistrustful look.

"Vasya, don't follow me, for heaven's sake! Wait for me here. I'll only be a minute. I'll come back to you at once," Arkady Ivanovich cried, losing his head too. He snatched up his cap and hurried for the doctor. Vasya sat down at once; he was meek and quiet, and only his eyes shone with a desperate sort of resolve. Remembering an open clasp-knife lying on the table, Arkady came back, pocketed it, looked at his poor friend for the last time, and rushed out of the flat.

It was after seven. The morning sun had long since driven the darkness from the room.

He couldn't find a doctor. He ran about for a whole hour. All the doctors whose addresses

he learned from the yard-cleaners whom he approached to ask if there wasn't some doctor living in the house had already left on their morning calls or had gone about their own affairs. He only found one doctor who was receiving patients at this hour. This one, however, questioned the servant who announced Nefedevich in great detail: who had sent him, who and why, and what was his complaint, and he even asked what this early visitor of his looked like? And as a result he declared he could not receive him, he was too busy to go out on a call, and that patients of this sort should be taken to the hospital.

Arkady, stricken and astonished, never expecting his efforts to end this way, gave up everything, all the doctors in the world, and hurried home, keyed up with anxiety for Vasya. He rushed into the flat. Mavra, completely unruffled, was sweeping the floor, chopping firewood, and getting ready to light the stove. He ran into the room—there was no trace of Vasya: he was gone.

"Where? Where would the poor fellow go?" Arkady wondered, cold with horror. He started firing questions at Mavra: she knew nothing, had seen nothing, and had not even heard

him go out, bless him. Nefedevich rushed to Kolomna. Heaven knows why it occurred to him that Vasya might be there.

It was already after nine when he arrived there. They were surprised to see him, but they knew nothing at all. He stood before them, alarmed and distressed, and asked them where Vasya was. The old lady's legs gave way; she collapsed on to the sofa. Lizanka, shaking with alarm, wanted him to tell her what had happened. What was there to tell? Arkady Ivanovich put them off with a story he invented on the spur of the moment, which they did not believe, of course, and hurried away, leaving them overwhelmed and stricken. He made haste to reach his office on time and let them know, so that steps could be taken as soon as possible. It struck him that perhaps Vasya was at Yulian Mastakovich's. That was most probable! It had occurred to him before he ever thought of the Artemyevs. He ordered the driver to stop as he went past His Excellency's home, but instantly told him to drive on. He decided to try and find out if anything was known at the office and then, if Vasya hadn't been there, he would present himself to His Excellency, at least as one making a report about Vasya.

Somebody would have to make the report, anyway!

The minute he entered the hall he was surrounded by the younger of his colleagues, mostly his equals in rank, who all at the same time began to ply him with questions about Vasya. All of them were saying, too, that Vasya had gone out of his mind, his mania being that they were going to send him into the army because he had been remiss in his duties. Arkady Ivanovich answered right and left, or, I should say, he gave no one a definite answer, and pressed on to the inner rooms. On the way he learnt that Vasya was with Yulian Mastakovich, that everyone had gone in there and that Hesper Ivanovich was there too. This made him pause. One of his superiors asked him where he was going and what he wanted. Without distinguishing the speaker's face, he mumbled something about Vasya and walked straight towards the room. He could hear Yulian Mastakovich's voice coming from within. "Where are you going?" someone asked him at the very door. Arkady Ivanovich almost lost courage; he was about to turn back, when suddenly he saw his poor Vasya through the half-open door. He pushed it wide

open and went in. Confusion and bewilderment reigned in the room, because Yulian Mastakovich, it seemed, was deeply distressed. The more important of the gentlemen stood close beside him, discussing the matter and arriving at no decision whatever. Vasya stood apart. Arkady's heart sank when he looked at him. Vasya stood rigidly at attention, his face pale and his head high. He was staring straight into the eyes of Yulian Mastakovich. Nefedevich's arrival was noted instantly, and someone who knew the two lodged together, informed His Excellency of the fact. Arkady was taken up to him. He looked up at Yulian Mastakovich, prepared to answer all the questions put to him, but when he saw the sincere pity written on his face, Arkady burst into shuddering sobs like a child. Indeed, he did more: he seized his superior's hand and raised it to his eyes, drenching it with his tears, so Yulian Mastakovich himself was obliged to pull it hastily away, shake it and say, "Enough now, young fellow, enough, I see that you have a good heart." Arkady sobbed and threw beseeching glances at all those present. He believed that everyone felt brotherly love for his poor Vasya, that all of them were

in torment too and were weeping for him. "But what caused it, why did this happen to him?" Yulian Mastakovich asked. "Why did he go out of his mind?"

"From gra-grati-ti-tude!" was all Arkady Ivanovich could utter.

His answer puzzled everyone, and, indeed, it seemed a strange and incredible thing: how could a man possibly go out of his mind from gratitude? Arkady explained as best he could.

"Heavens, what a pity!" Yulian Mastakovich spoke at last. "And the work entrusted to him was not so important and not urgent at all. A life wrecked for no good reason at all! Oh well, take him away!" Whereupon Yulian Mastakovich turned to Arkady Ivanovich once more, and asked him to tell the whole story again. "He asks," he said, indicating Vasya, that a certain girl should not be told about this; who is she, his fiancée?"

Arkady began to explain the situation. Meanwhile, Vasya seemed preoccupied with some thought, he seemed to be making a strenuous effort to recollect something important and essential, which was just what was needed at the moment. Now and then he gazed

about him with a look of suffering in his eyes, as though hoping that someone would remind him of what it was he had forgotten. His eyes came to rest on Arkady Ivanovich. Suddenly, a glimmer of hope seemed to light in them, he started, and marched three paces, left foot forward, as smartly as he could, even clicking the heel of his right foot, like a soldier coming to attention to answer an officer's summons. Everyone stood and waited for what was to come next.

"I have a physical defect, Your Excellency, I am short and weak, I am not fit for military service," he jerked out the words.

At this everyone in the room felt their hearts wrenched, and even Yulian Mastakovich, for all his firmness, was moved to tears. "Take him away!" he said with a wave of his hand.

"Marching orders!" Vasya said in an undertone and, turning sharply on his heel, marched out of the room. All the gentlemen who felt concern for his predicament rushed after him. Arkady pressed close behind the others. They seated Vasya in the waiting-room, in anticipation of the ambulance to take him away to the hospital. He sat in silence and

appeared to be greatly preoccupied. He nodded to those he recognized as though he were bidding them good-bye. He kept glancing at the door, prepared to hear the word "go." A crowd of people surrounded him in a close circle: all shook their heads and all lamented his fate. Many were amazed by Vasya's story, which was common property by then. Some discussed it, others pitied and praised Vasya, who was such a modest and quiet young man, they said, and was so promising; they went on to say how hard he had tried to study, what an inquisitive mind he had, and how he had striven to improve himself. "He rose above his low station in life by his own effort," someone observed. Yulian Mastakovich's attachment to Vasya was spoken of with feeling. Explanations were offered by some why the fear of being sent into the army had entered Vasya's mind and deranged it. They said that the poor chap had until just recently belonged to the class liable for military service, and had only been promoted to his first rank through the mediation of Yulian Mastakovich, who was appreciative of his giftedness, obedience, and inordinate meekness. In short, opinions and comments were varied and plen-

ty. One of Vasya's colleagues, a very short man, stood out particularly among the overwhelmed. And it wasn't that he was so very young either, he must have been about thirty. But he was as white as a sheet, his whole body trembled, and the smile on his face was rather odd—for the reason, perhaps, that every shocking little affair or scene of horror is apt to appear frightening and at the same time rather fascinating to a mere onlooker. He kept running around the circle of gentlemen surrounding Vasya, and being a short little man, he would stand on tiptoe, clutch at the coat buttons of all and sundry—that is, all those he had a right to clutch—and repeat over and over again that he knew the reason for all this, that it was not a trifling sort of matter at all but rather a grave one, and that something had to be done; then he'd rise up on tiptoe again, whisper into his listener's ear, nod his head once or twice, and run on again. Everything was over at last: a feldsher and an orderly arrived from the hospital, they went up to Vasya and told him it was time to go. He jumped up hastily and followed them out. He kept glancing back over his shoulder: he was searching for someone with his eyes. "Vasya!

Vasya!" Arkady Ivanovich screamed, sobbing. Vasya stopped, and Arkady managed to force his way through to him. They rushed into each other's arms for the last time, and clung together in a tight embrace. It made one sad to look at them. What chimera of grief was wrenching the tears from their eyes! Why were they crying? What was this disaster? Why had they not understood each other...?

"Here, here, take this! Keep it for me," Shumkov said, thrusting a folded piece of paper into Arkady's hand. "They'll take it from me. Bring it to me afterwards, please; keep it for me...." Vasya did not finish, someone called him. He ran hurriedly down the stairs, nodding to everyone, saying good-bye. There was despair in his expression. At last they settled him in the ambulance, and drove off. Arkady quickly unfolded the paper: in it was Liza's lock of black hair, which Vasya had never parted with. Stinging tears gushed from Arkady's eyes: "Ah, poor Liza!"

His office hours over, he set out for Kolomna. What happened there is beyond description. Even Petya, little Petya, without quite understanding what had become of good, kind

Vasya, went into a corner, covered his face with his hands, and sobbed from the depths of his young heart. It was already dusk when Arkady started back for home. As he approached the Neva he paused for a minute and gazed intently down the river, into the foggy distance, hazy with frost and suddenly flushed with the last crimson glow of the blood-red sun which was slowly sinking beyond the misty horizon. Night was descending upon the town, and in the parting reflection of the sun the whole expanse of the Neva—boundless, and swollen with the frozen snow—scintillated with a myriad sparks scattered by the silvery needles of hoar-frost. The temperature fell to twenty below. Frozen steam rose from the hard-ridden horses and from the hurrying pedestrians. The thin air quivered with the slightest sound, and columns of smoke uncoiled like giants from all the roof-tops on both sides of the river and streamed upwards in the cold sky, twining and untwining as they soared, and it seemed that new buildings were rising above the old, a new city was taking shape in the air. In this hour of twilight it seemed that all this world with all its inhabitants, the strong and the

weak, with all their dwellings, be they the hovels of the poor or gilded palaces, the solace of the mighty of this world, was like a phantasm, magic and illusory, a dream which in turn would vanish momentarily and fade away in vapour towards the dark blue sky. Strange thoughts haunted poor Vasya's bereaved friend. He started, and then he felt a hot rush of blood, boiling suddenly from some powerful but as yet inexperienced emotion, gush over his heart. It seemed that only now was he able to understand all this disaster and what had driven his poor Vasya, who could not bear his happiness, out of his mind. His lips quivered, his eyes flashed, he paled, and in that moment he seemed to pierce the veil into a new beyond....

He grew melancholy and gloomy and lost all his cheerfulness. He came to loathe his old flat and moved into another one. He could not go to Kolomna, nor did he wish to. Two years later he met Lizanka in church. She was already married, behind her walked a wet-nurse, carrying a baby. They talked, and for as long as possible they tried to put off mentioning the past. Liza told him she was glad to say that she was happy, that she was

not in need, that her husband was a good man and she loved him. But suddenly, in the middle of her speech, her eyes filled with tears, her voice grew faint and, turning away, she sank on her knees on the parvis, to hide her sorrow from the world....

1848

A CHRISTMAS PARTY AND A WEDDING

(From Notes by One Unknown)

I saw a wedding the other day . . . but no, I'd better tell you about the Christmas party. The wedding was splendid, I liked it very

much, but the other event was better. I don't know why I remembered that Christmas party as I watched the wedding. But this is what happened. On New Year's Eve, almost five years ago to the day, I was a guest at a children's party. The gentleman who had invited me was a well-known figure in business, a man with connections, a circle of friends, and intrigues, and so it could be supposed that this children's party was a pretext for the parents to meet and discuss various interesting matters in an innocent, casual, and accidental manner. I was a stranger there; I had no matters to discuss, and therefore I was rather on my own all evening. There was another gentleman there, who like myself seemed to have neither kith nor kin but chanced to be present at this display of family bliss. He, more than anyone else, attracted my attention. He was a tall, spare man, very grave, and dressed quite well. But it was obvious that his mind was not on gaiety, nor on this family festivity. The minute he walked away into a corner somewhere, he stopped smiling and knitted his thick black eyebrows. He did not know a soul at this party except his host. It was evident that he was dreadfully bored, but he bravely

maintained the role of a perfectly happy and amused man to the end. I learnt afterwards that this gentleman had come from the provinces, that he had some important, and intricate business in the capital, that he had brought a letter of introduction to our host, and that the latter was not aiding him *con amore* at all, and had only invited him to his children's party out of sheer politeness. Cards were not being played, no one offered him a cigar, and no one entered into conversation with him, recognizing a bird by its feathers perhaps, and therefore my gentleman was obliged to stroke his sideburns the whole evening, if only to keep his hands occupied. His sideburns were really quite splendid. But he stroked them so assiduously that, looking at him, one could well believe that it was the sideburns which had first come into the world, the gentleman only having been attached to them afterwards, in order to stroke them.

Besides this gentleman, who was thus taking part in the family rejoicing of his host, the father of five well-fed little boys, there was another person there who attracted me. But this one was of an entirely different grain. He was a "figure." His name was Yulian Masta-

kovich. From the very first glance one could see that he was the guest of honour, and stood in the same relation to his host as the host stood to the gentleman stroking his sideburns. The host and hostess showered him with compliments, they waited upon him, kept his glass filled, and fawned upon him; they brought up their guests to be presented to him, while he was not brought up to anyone. I noticed that a tear glimmered in my host's eye when Yulian Mastakovich, commenting on the party, said he had rarely passed the time so pleasantly. It frightened me somehow to remain in the presence of a person like that, and so, having had my pleasurable look at the children, I withdrew into a small sitting-room which was quite deserted and took refuge in the hostess' flower arbour, which took up almost half the room.

The children were all incredibly sweet, and absolutely refused to resemble grown-ups, in spite of all the admonishments of their governesses and mammas. They had dismantled the Christmas tree to the last sweet in a matter of seconds, and had already managed to break half the toys before they had found out which toy was meant for whom. I particularly

liked one black-eyed little boy with ringlets who was set on shooting me with his wooden rifle. But the most attractive of all was his sister, a girl of eleven or so, as sweet as a cupid, reticent, thoughtful and pale, with large, pensive, and prominent eyes. The other children must have offended her and so she came away into the sitting-room where I was, and busied herself in a corner with her doll. Her father, a wealthy tax-farmer, was pointed out by the guests with respect, and it was whispered that the sum of three hundred thousand rubles had already been laid aside for her dowry. I glanced back to look at the ones who were displaying such interest in this matter, and my eyes fell upon Yulian Mastakovich who, with his hands clasped behind his back and head inclined very slightly sideways, was listening to this idle talk with a peculiar sort of keenness.

And then, I could not but marvel at the wisdom of my hosts in the distribution of the children's gifts. The girl, who already possessed a dowry of three hundred thousand, received a gorgeous doll. The gifts then took a downward trend, according to the descending ranks of the parents of all these fortunate chil-

dren. Finally, the last child, a boy of about ten—thin, small, freckled, and red-haired—was given nothing but a book of stories telling of Nature's grandeur, of sentimental tears and so on, with no pictures in it, or even a vignette. His mother, a poor widow, was the governess in this house, and he was an extremely downtrodden and cowed little boy. He was dressed in a jacket of miserable nankeen. After receiving his book, he hovered close to the others and their toys for a long while: he wanted dreadfully to play with the children, but he did not dare; it was evident that he already felt and understood his position. I am very fond of observing children. Their first independent reaction to life is exceedingly curious. I noticed that the little red-haired boy was so fascinated by the costly toys of the other children, and especially by the theatre in which he so keenly wanted to take part, that he resolved to play a mean little game. He smiled and made advances to the other children, he gave up his apple to a bloated boy who had a handkerchief full of goodies tied up for him, and he even allowed another boy to ride on his back, only so that he should not be driven away from the theatre.

But a minute later, one of the mischief-makers beat him up rather soundly. The child dared not cry. His mamma, the governess, then appeared on the scene and told him not to interfere with the other children's game. The child withdrew into the sitting-room where the girl had gone. She admitted him into her game, and the two of them began to dress up her costly doll with great absorption.

I had been sitting in the ivy arbour for almost half an hour and had all but dozed off, listening to the soft conversation between the red-haired boy and the beautiful girl with a dowry of three hundred thousand as they fussed with the doll, when suddenly Yulian Mastakovich walked into the room. He had taken advantage of a shocking quarrel between the children in the ballroom and had quietly made his way here. I noticed that only a minute ago he had been talking rather enthusiastically with the father of the future wealthy bride, whom he had just met, about the preference of some post to another. And now he stood lost in thought and seemed to be counting something on his fingers.

"Three hundred ... three hundred ..." he whispered, "eleven ... twelve ... thirteen

and.... Sixteen—five years! Let's say four per cent—twelve, five times—sixty, and then the sixty, well, let's say it'll make four hundred in five years. Hm! But ... but the rascal isn't keeping it at four per cent, surely! He may be getting eight or ten per hundred. Well, five hundred, say five hundred thousand, that, at least, is certain; well, and the surplus for the trousseau, hm...."

He concluded his reflections, blew his nose, and was about to leave the room when suddenly his glance fell on the girl and he paused. He did not see me behind the potted plants. It seemed to me that he was greatly agitated. Perhaps it was the effect of his calculations, or it may have been something else, but whatever the cause he rubbed his hands excitedly and could not stand still. This agitation increased to *nec plus ultra* when he paused and cast another resolute glance at the future bride. He made a move forward, looking about him first, however. Then on tiptoe, as though feeling guilty, he began to steal up to the child. He approached her with a simper, bent down, and kissed the top of her head. The girl, taken unawares, cried out in alarm.

"And what are you doing here, dear child?"

he asked in a whisper, looked around, and pinched the little girl's cheek.

"We're playing."

"Eh? With him?" Yulian Mastakovich gave the boy an oblique look.

"Why don't you go into the ballroom, my lad," he said to the boy.

The boy said nothing and stared at him hard. Yulian Mastakovich glanced about him again and once more bent over the girl.

"And what have you got there, a dolly, dear child?" he asked.

"A dolly..." replied the girl, pouting and shrinking a little.

"A dolly.... And do you know what your dolly is made of, dear child?"

"No..." the little girl whispered in reply and dropped her head altogether.

"Why, of rags, my pet. You'd better go into the ballroom, little boy, to your playmates," said Yulian Mastakovich with a stern look at the boy. The girl and the boy winced and clutched each other. They did not want to part.

"And do you know why you were given that dolly?" asked Yulian Mastakovich, lowering his voice.

"No...."

"Because you were a sweet and well-behaved child all week."

At this point, Yulian Mastakovich, whose excitement had risen to quite a pitch, glanced around and asked at last, speaking lower and lower still, in a voice that was barely audible, almost dying away entirely from excitement and impatience:

"And will you be nice to me, dear child, when I come to visit your parents?"

Saying this, Yulian Mastakovich wanted to kiss the dear child once more, but the red-haired boy caught her hands in his on seeing that she was quite ready to cry and began to whimper from the fullness of his sympathy with her. Yulian Mastakovich grew very angry indeed.

"Be off with you, be off with you!" he said to the boy. "Off into the ballroom, go away, go to the other boys there!"

"No, don't, don't send him away! *You* go!" cried the girl. "Let him be, let him be!" she repeated, almost in tears.

Someone was heard entering the room. Yulian Mastakovich instantly straightened his majestic back and grew frightened. But the red-haired little boy was even more frightened than Yulian Mastakovich; he abandoned

the girl and quietly, hugging the wall, made his way out and into the dining-room. To obviate any suspicions, Yulian Mastakovich went into the dining-room too. He was as red as a lobster and, glancing into a mirror, he seemed to grow embarrassed at his own reflection. Perhaps he was annoyed at his unwonted display of excitement and impatience. It may have been that his calculations on his fingers had so struck him, so tempted and inspired him, that in spite of his sedateness and importance he had ventured to act like a youngster and attack his object directly, disregarding the fact that this object would only become a real object at least five years hence. I followed the distinguished gentleman into the dining-room and witnessed a strange scene. Yulian Mastakovich, flushed all over with anger and vexation, was intimidating the red-haired boy who, backing away from him further and further, did not know which way to turn in his fright.

"Off with you! What are you up to here, you rascal, off with you! Stealing fruit, were you? You're stealing fruit, eh? Off with you, you rascal, off, you snivelling lout, off, off to your playmates!"

The terrified little boy, deciding on desperate action, made an attempt to hide under the table. And then his persecutor, incensed to the limit, took out his large lawn handkerchief and started whipping out the completely cowed boy from under the table. It should be noted that Yulian Mastakovich was rather too fat. He was a smug, pink-cheeked, thick-set, pot-bellied little man with very plump thighs; in a word he was what is known as "robust," nicely rounded like a little nut. He was perspiring, wheezing, and flushing dreadfully. He was almost exasperated at last, so great was his feeling of indignation and, perhaps (who knows?), jealousy. I burst into a roar of laughter. Yulian Mastakovich turned round and, in spite of all his importance, was utterly discomfited. Just then our host came in through the opposite door. The boy crawled out from under the table and stood dusting his knees and elbows. Yulian Mastakovich hastened to apply to his nose the handkerchief he was holding by one corner.

The host looked at the three of us in some wonder, but being a man who knew life and who looked at it from a serious point of view,

he immediately took advantage of the fact that he had caught his guest alone.

"This is the boy," he said, pointing to the red-haired child, "the one I had the honour to ask you to. . . ."

"Eh?" replied Yulian Mastakovich, who had not quite recovered yet.

"The son of my children's governess," the host continued in the tones of a petitioner, "a poor woman, a widow, wife of an honest clerk, and so . . . Yulian Mastakovich, if it's at all possible. . . ."

"Oh no, no!" Yulian Mastakovich broke in hurriedly. "No, forgive me, Filip Alexeyevich, it's quite impossible. I've inquired, there's no vacancy, and even if there were, there are as many as ten candidates already, with much more right to it than he has . . . very sorry, very sorry."

"A pity," said the host, "the boy is modest and quiet."

"Awfully naughty as far as I can see," replied Yulian Mastakovich, twisting his mouth hysterically. "Go away, little boy, what are you standing here for, go to your playmates!" he said, turning to the boy.

He could not help himself at this point, ap-

parently, and glanced at me with half an eye. I could not help myself either and burst out laughing straight in his face. Yulian Mastakovich instantly turned away and rather pointedly for my benefit asked the host who that queer young man could be. They began whispering together and left the room. I saw Yulian Mastakovich shake his head with mistrust as he listened to what our host was saying to him.

Having laughed to my heart's content, I went back into the ballroom. There, the great man, surrounded by the fathers and the mothers, the host and the hostess, was holding forth to a lady he had just been presented to. The lady held by the hand the little girl Yulian Mastakovich had had the interlude with in the sitting-room ten minutes before. Now he was showering compliments and praises on the beauty, giftedness, grace, and demeanour of the dear little child. He was noticeably courting favour with the mamma. The mother listened to him almost with tears of joy. There was a smile on the father's lips. Our host was overjoyed with this general effusion of joy. All the guests, too, were in sympathy, and even the children's games were ended lest they disturb

the conversation. The very air was permeated with veneration. I then heard the pretty girl's mamma, moved to the depths of her soul, ask Yulian Mastakovich, in well-chosen terms, to do her the great honour of favouring their home with his esteemed friendship; I heard with what genuine delight the invitation was accepted by Yulian Mastakovich, and how the guests, straying away in groups according to the rules of decorum, tried to outshine one another in touching praise of the tax-farmer, the tax-farmer's wife, the little girl and, most of all, of Yulian Mastakovich.

"Is this gentleman married?" I asked, almost loudly, of one of my acquaintances who was standing closest to Yulian Mastakovich.

Yulian Mastakovich flashed a searching and irate look at me.

"No," replied my acquaintance, grieved to the bottom of his heart by my tactlessness, which I had meant intentionally.

The other day, as I was walking past a church, I was struck by the crowd and the splendour of the assembly. Everyone was discussing the wedding they had come to

attend. The day was overcast, frost was setting in. I made my way into the church with the crowd and saw the bridegroom. He was a short, rounded, and smug little man with a belly. His display of medals was imposing. He trotted about, bustling and issuing orders. At last I heard someone say that the bride had arrived. I pushed my way through and saw a wondrous beauty, barely in the first spring of her youth. But the beauty was pale and sad. She looked preoccupied; it even seemed to me that her eyes were red from recent tears. The classical perfection of her every feature lent an air of solemnity and dignity to her beauty. But one still caught a glimpse of the early, childish and innocent countenance through this solemnity and dignity, and through this sadness; there was a glimmer of something so inordinately naïve, youthful and as yet unsettled, that in itself it was like an unspoken plea for mercy.

It was said that she was barely sixteen. I looked at the bridegroom intently and suddenly I recognized him as Yulian Mastakovich whom I had not seen for exactly five years. I looked at her.... Oh my God! I began to elbow my way quickly out of the church. There

was talk in the crowd that the bride was wealthy, that the bride had brought a dowry of five hundred thousand and a trousseau costing so much and so much. . . .

"His calculation was indeed sound," I thought as I pushed my way out into the street.

1848

THE LITTLE HERO

(From Unknown Memoirs)

I was not quite eleven at the time. My parents accepted an invitation for me to spend the month of July with Mr. T., a relative of ours,

at his country house near Moscow, where he had some fifty guests staying with him, or maybe more ... I don't remember, I didn't count them. It was noisy and gay. It seemed to be a festivity that had been started never to end. It appeared too that our host had promised himself to squander his whole immense fortune as quickly as possible, and in fact he succeeded in keeping this promise a little while ago, that is, he squandered everything he had, completely and utterly, to the very last scrap. Guests kept coming in a continuous stream, for Moscow was but a stone's throw away, in sight practically, and so departing guests only made way for new arrivals, and the festivities went on. One form of amusement followed another, and the variety of entertainments seemed inexhaustible. There was riding in the country in whole parties, or walks along the river or to the woods; picnics, lunches in the open; dinners on the large terrace, precious flowers arranged in rows upon it flooding the freshness of the night with their fragrance, brilliant lighting which made our ladies, very pretty almost every one of them, appear lovelier still, their eyes sparkling, their faces radiant with the pleasurable impressions of the

day, their vivacious cross-fire of conversation mingling with silvery peals of laughter. There was dancing, music, and singing; or if the sky was overcast, they had theatricals and tableaux, charades, and games of proverbs, or were entertained by the wits, eloquent speakers and story-tellers from among the guests.

And now I came to distinguish several figures who stood out in sharp relief. Slander and gossip went on as usual, of course, for without it the universe would topple and millions of ladies and gentlemen would perish from boredom like flies. But being only eleven, I did not take much notice of these ladies and gentlemen, occupied as I was with entirely different matters, and even if I did notice something it was not all. I did recall some of the things afterwards, though, child that I was, I could only see the brilliant side of the picture, and I was so struck by this abounding gaiety, glitter, and noise, all this that I had never before seen nor heard that I felt quite lost during the first few days and my young head was in a whirl.

However, I keep on mentioning that I was eleven, and of course I was a mere child and no more than a child. It never occurred to

most of these beautiful ladies fondling me to give a thought to my age yet. But, strangely enough, a sensation I myself did not understand had already taken possession of me: something unfamiliar and as yet unknown was already stirring my heart-strings, something that made my heart burn and palpitate as though it were frightened, and often suffused my face with sudden colour. The various privileges accorded my youth turned me to shame and even grieved me at times. Or then again I would be overwhelmed with something like amazement, and I would go away where no one could see me, as if I felt a need to draw breath and endeavour to remember something, something that I thought I had known very well until then and had suddenly forgotten, but something without which I could neither appear before the others nor even exist.

Or then I would fancy that I was keeping something back from the world, but not for anything, not to anyone would I ever have revealed my secret, because it shamed me, the little man, to tears. Soon I began to feel a sort of loneliness amid the whirl which eddied about me. There were other children there too,

but all of them were either much younger or much older than I; and, anyway, I could not concern myself with them. Of course, nothing would have happened to me had I not been in an exceptional position. In the eyes of all those beautiful ladies I was still the same tiny and indefinite creature they occasionally liked to fondle, and with which they could play as with a little doll. One of them particularly, a charming blonde with the richest and loveliest hair that I had ever seen or ever expected to see, seemed to have vowed never to leave me in peace. I was embarrassed and she was delighted at the merry outbursts of laughter about us, provoked by the daring and whimsical pranks she played on me, which evidently pleased her tremendously. In a girls' boarding school, they would probably have nicknamed her "madcap." She was a miracle of loveliness, and there was something in her beauty that simply thrust itself into your eyes the first time you saw her. And, needless to say, she was not one of those retiring little blondes, white and fluffy, gentle like white mice or like pastors' daughters. She was not tall and was rather plump, but her features were delicate and fine, charmingly etched. There

was something in her face that was like a flash of lightning, but then she was altogether like a flame—lively, swift, and light. Her large, wide-open eyes seemed to scatter sparks; they glittered like diamonds, and never would I exchange such blue, sparkling eyes for any black ones, be they blacker than the blackest of Andalusian eyes, and then my blonde lady herself was truly worth that famous brunette whose praises a famous and splendid poet had sung, the one who swore by the whole of Castile, in such superb poetry, that he would be willing to break all his bones if he were only allowed to touch his lady's mantilla with the tip of his finger. Now add to this that *my* beautiful lady was the merriest of all the beauties in the world, with a most whimsical sense of humour, and sprightly like a child in spite of having been married for five years or so. A smile was always upon her lips, fresh with the freshness of a rose at dawn which has just opened its crimson fragrant bud, and was still gleaming with the large cool drops of dew in the first rays of the sun.

I remember they were staging theatricals the day after I arrived. The ballroom was packed, there was not a vacant chair in the

room, and as I happened to be late for some reason or other, I was obliged to enjoy the performance standing at the back of the hall. However, the jolly acting drew me closer and closer to the stage and, without noticing it, I made my way to the very first rows, where I finally came to stand leaning on the back of somebody's chair. It was the chair of my blonde lady, but we did not know each other yet. And then, unwittingly somehow, I found myself gazing in admiration at her wonderfully rounded, seductive shoulders, full and white like milky foam, although at that time it was a matter of complete indifference to me whether I looked at a woman's beautiful shoulders or the bonnet with flame-coloured ribbons that concealed the grey hair of a certain distinguished lady sitting in the front row. Next to my blonde lady sat an overripe old maid, one of those, as I happened to notice afterwards, who invariably nestle as close as they possibly can to young and pretty women, preferably ones who do not shun the attentions of young men. But that's beside the point; what mattered was that this old maid intercepted my gaze, leaned towards her friend and, giggling, whispered something into her ear. Her friend turned

round suddenly and her sparkling eyes flashed at me so brightly in the semi-darkness that I, unprepared to meet them, started as though I had been scorched. The beautiful lady smiled.

"Do you like the play?" she asked, looking archly and mockingly into my eyes.

"Yes," I replied, still gazing at her in wonder, which was evidently pleasing to her.

"But why are you standing? You'll be tired, haven't you got a seat?"

"That's the whole point, I haven't," I replied, more concerned with my plight just then than with the beautiful lady's sparkling eyes, and feeling genuinely relieved that I had at last found a kind soul I could tell my troubles to. "I've looked already, but all the chairs are taken," I added, as if I were complaining to her that all the seats were occupied.

"Come here," she suggested eagerly, as swift in all her decisions as in her readiness to act upon any fantastic notion that happened to flash through her frivolous mind. "Come here to me, come and sit on my lap!"

"Your lap?" I repeated, bewildered.

I have already said that the privileges accorded me as a child were beginning to wound

and shame me. And the privilege offered me now, mockingly it seemed, was really going too far. Moreover, timid and shy enough by nature, I had lately begun to feel particularly shy of women, and therefore I was thrown into utter confusion by her suggestion.

"Yes, of course! Why don't you want to sit on my lap?" she persisted, chuckling louder and louder until at last she simply burst out laughing, heaven knows why, at her own idea perhaps, or in her delight that she had embarrassed me so. But that was just what she was after.

I blushed and looked about me in perplexity, seeking a way of escape; but she had forestalled me, somehow managing to catch hold of my hand for the very purpose of preventing my getting away, and, pulling me close to herself, she suddenly, quite unexpectedly and to my greatest amazement, crushed my hand most painfully in her naughty, hot fingers, and began to pinch mine so viciously that I had to muster all my self-control to check a scream, wincing the while in a very silly way. Moreover, I was terribly amazed, puzzled and even horrified to learn that there were such funny and spiteful ladies who said such silly

things to little boys, and who pinched them so painfully, heaven knows why and in front of everybody, too. I expect my unhappy face reflected all my bewilderment, for the mischievous lady laughed straight into my eyes like one demented, while she went on pinching and crushing my poor fingers harder and harder. She was beside herself with joy, delighted that she had not missed an opportunity of acting like a madcap, and of confusing and utterly bewildering a poor boy. I was in desperate straits. I was burning with shame, because everyone had turned round to look at us, some in wonder, and others in laughter, instantly realizing that the beautiful lady had played one of her pranks. Besides, I wanted to scream so desperately, because she was wrenching my fingers as though in exasperation for the very reason that I did not scream; and I, like a Spartan, resolved to endure the pain, afraid of creating a commotion with my screams, for if there had been a commotion, I don't know what would have happened to me. At last, in a fit of utter despair, I began to struggle, pulling my hand out of her grasp with all my strength, but my tormentor was much stronger than I was. Finally, unable to stand it any

longer, I cried out—that was just what she was waiting for! In a flash she released my hand and turned away as if nothing had occurred, as if it was not her but someone else's doing, well, exactly like a schoolboy who gets into mischief the minute the teacher's back is turned, pinching some tiny, weak little boy, giving him a fillip or a kick, jerking his elbow, and in a twinkling turning round again, straightening up and plunging into his lesson, engrossed in his book, thus leaving the irate teacher, swooping down upon the scuffle like a hawk, quite unexpectedly and completely fooled.

But fortunately for me, at that moment everyone's attention was captivated by the splendid acting of our host, who had the leading part in the play, one of Scribe's comedies. Applause broke out; I took my chance and slipped into the aisle, ran to the very back of the hall to the opposite corner and, hiding behind a pillar, stared in horror in the direction of my treacherous lady's chair. She was still laughing, pressing a handkerchief to her lips. She kept glancing over her shoulder, searching for me in every corner with her eyes, probably feeling disappointed that our silly scuffle was

over so soon, and thinking up some new bit of mischief.

This was how we first became acquainted, and from that evening on she never gave me a moment's peace. She victimized me without shame or measure, she became my persecutor, my tormentor. What made the pranks she played on me so amusing was that she had declared herself to be head over heels in love with me, and she teased me in front of everyone. And of course, perfect savage that I was, I felt grieved and hurt to tears by all this, my plight becoming so dire at times that I would have gladly fought it out with my treacherous "adorer." My naïve embarrassment, my desperate anguish seemed to inspire her to persecute me to the end. She knew no pity, and I knew not where to hide from her. The laughter which broke out about us, and which she certainly was good at provoking, only incited her to fresh mischief. But her audience at last began to think that her jokes were being carried too far. And indeed, when I come to think of it now, she did take too many liberties with a child of my age.

But such was her nature: she was a perfect pattern of a spoilt child. I later heard that the

person who had spoiled her more than anyone else was her own husband, a very plump, very short, and very red-faced little man, very wealthy and very business-like, by appearance at least, for he fussed and bustled about, and could not bear to remain in the same spot for more than a couple of hours. He used to travel to Moscow every day, sometimes even twice a day, and always on business, as he himself asserted. You could hardly have found a face more good-natured and jolly than his comic and yet at all times honest one. He not only loved his wife to the point of weakness and pathos, he simply worshipped her like an idol.

He did not restrict her in anything. She had a great number of friends of both sexes. First of all because she was well liked by most people, and secondly, because the flighty lady herself was not too particular in her choice of friends although, fundamentally, she was much more serious-minded than could be assumed from what I have just related about her. But among all her friends there was one young lady whom she set apart and cared for most, a distant relative of hers, who was also among the house guests now. Their friendship was ten-

der and subtle, one of those ties which are sometimes formed between two persons whose natures are often totally contrasting, when one of the two is stricter, deeper and purer, while the other, conscious of her friend's superiority, obeys her lovingly with gallant humility and a noble feeling of self-appraisal, and clasps this friendship to her heart the way one clasps one's happiness. And then the two become linked by bonds of tenderness and noble subtlety: love and complete understanding on the one side, love and esteem on the other, esteem bordering on fear, on fear of lowering herself in the eyes of the one she values so dearly, on a jealous, avid desire to approach that heart closer and closer with every step made in life. The two friends were of the same age, but they were utterly different from each other in every respect, beginning with their beauty. Mme M. was very good-looking too, but there was something individual in her beauty, setting her distinctly apart from the crowd of pretty women. There was something in her face that instantly and irresistibly attracted everyone or, rather, inspired those who met her to a noble and lofty regard for her. There are such fortunate faces. When close to her, one

felt better somehow, warmer, and more light-hearted, and yet her large wistful eyes, full of fire and strength, had a timid and uneasy look in them, as though she were constantly being threatened with something hostile and sinister, and this strange timidity at times overshadowed her sweet, gentle countenance, reminiscent of the pure faces of the Italian Madonnas, with such deep melancholy that, looking at her, you came to share the sadness as though it were your own personal grief. The earlier, childishly clear countenance still peeped so often through the immaculate beauty of the perfect and regular features and the despondent severity of the deep, unspoken sadness in this pale, drawn face; and this countenance of but recent trusting youth and perhaps artless happiness, the gentle smile, timid and wavering—all of it overwhelmed one with such an inexplicable feeling of compassion for this woman, that in the hearts of one and all a sweet and ardent solicitude was spontaneously kindled, which made you her champion and endeared her to you before you had really come to know her. But the beautiful lady seemed reticent and secretive, whereas,

to be sure, there was not a being more solicitous or affectionate whenever someone was in need of sympathy. There are women like that, born sisters of charity in this world. One need not conceal anything from them, at least none of the pain or the wound in one's soul. If you are in torment, go to them bravely and hopefully, and do not be afraid of being a burden to them, for it is not for us to fathom the depths of infinitely patient love, compassion, and forgiveness in the hearts of some women. A wealth of kindness, consolation, and hope is treasured in these pure hearts, which are so often wounded too, for a heart that loves much, grieves much, but the wound is carefully concealed from curious eyes, because deep-felt sorrow is mostly borne in silence and in secret. They will not shrink from the deepness of your wound, from its pus or its stench; whoever approaches them becomes worthy of them, for they seem to be born for heroism.... Mme M. was tall, supple and shapely, but somewhat thin. All her movements were uneven, slow one moment, graceful and rather sedate, or childishly impulsive the next, but at the same time there was something humbly submissive

in them, something tremulous and unprotected, but which neither asked nor sought protection from anyone.

I have already said that the treacherous blonde lady's unworthy attitude shamed me, stung and wounded me to the quick. But there was another reason for this now, a secret, strange, and stupid reason which I concealed and guarded like a miser, the very thought of which, when alone with my reeling senses in some dark, secret corner which no mocking, inquisitorial blue eyes could penetrate, smothered me with embarrassment, shame and fear—in a word, I was in love, that is, I suppose I'm talking rubbish, it could not have been that. But then why was my attention caught by just one face alone from all those about me? Why was I so fond of following her with my eyes, although at that time I was quite definitely uninterested in ladies and their friendship? This feeling usually took possession of me in the evenings, when miserable weather drove everyone indoors and I, quietly sitting alone in a far corner of the ballroom, gazed about me aimlessly, unable to find any other pastime at all, for apart from my persecutors, I was

seldom spoken to, and I felt unbearably bored on such evenings. And then I would peer at the faces in the room, I would listen hard to their conversation, of which I understood nothing more often than not, and it was at moments like these that my spellbound attention was caught, heaven knows why, by the soft glances, gentle smile and lovely face of Mme M. (for it was she), and I would be obsessed by this strange, indefinite, and infinitely sweet sensation. I often gazed at her for hours at a time, I seemed unable to tear my eyes away from her; I learned her every gesture, every movement, my hearing knew each vibration of her rich, silvery but somewhat muffled voice; it's strange, though, that the timid and sweet impression I gathered from my observations of her was mingled with an inexplicable feeling of curiosity. It was as if I were delving into some mystery....

Taunts aimed at me in the presence of Mme M. tormented me more than anything. To my mind, these railleries and this clownish persecution were really too mortifying. And occasionally, when I was the object of bursts of concerted laughter in which even

Mme M. herself could not help but join, I'd be driven to desperation and, beside myself with anguish, I would break away from my tormentors and run away upstairs, and shun everyone for the rest of the day, dreading to appear in the ballroom again. However, I did not fully understand either my shame or my agitation at the time: I went through the whole process unconsciously. I had hardly spoken to Mme M. yet, and, of course, I would never have ventured to. And then, one evening, after a very wretched day, as I was making my way home through the garden alone, having lagged behind the others because I felt tired, I came upon Mme M. sitting on a bench in one of the secluded walks. She sat absently fingering her handkerchief, her head drooping low, all alone, as if she had purposely chosen this isolated spot. She was so lost in thought that she did not hear me coming up to her.

She quickly rose from the bench and turned away when she saw me, but I noticed that she was hurriedly wiping her eyes with her handkerchief. She had been crying. When her eyes were dry she smiled at me and we walked home together. I cannot recall what we

talked about, but I remember that she kept sending me away on any pretext she could think of: it was either a flower she wanted me to pick for her, or I had to go and see if there was anyone riding along another path near by. And as soon as I was gone, she instantly brought her handkerchief up to her eyes again, and wiped away her stubborn tears, which simply refused to be driven away, which welled up again and again in her heart and poured out of her poor eyes. I realized she must be finding my company very irksome, since she kept sending me away; my heart bled for her more than ever because she was unable to pull herself together although she saw that I had noticed everything. I was desperately angry with myself, I cursed myself for my awkwardness and lack of resourcefulness, and yet I did not know how best to leave her without showing that I had noticed her grief. And so I walked on beside her in sad bewilderment and even fright, utterly confused and quite incapable of finding anything to say to keep up our conversation, desultory as it was.

I was so struck by this encounter that for the remainder of the evening I stealthily

watched Mme M. with avid curiosity, never taking my eyes off her for a minute. But it happened that twice her glance caught me unawares, lost in contemplation, and when she looked at me for the second time, she smiled. This was the only time she did, the whole evening through. Her face, very pale now, had not yet lost its sadness. She sat talking quietly to an elderly lady, a spiteful and shrewish old woman whom everyone disliked for her spying and her gossiping, but whom everyone feared as well, thus being compelled to fawn upon her, willy-nilly.

Mme M.'s husband arrived at about ten. I had been watching her very closely all this time, my eyes fastened on her sorrowful face; and now I saw her start at her husband's unexpected entrance, and her already pale face suddenly turned whiter still. It was so noticeable that others saw it too; I could hear snatches of conversation drifting to me, from which I managed to make out that Mme M. was not quite well. It was said that her husband was as jealous as a Moor, not from love for her but because of his amour-propre. In the first place he was a European, a modern man, with a smattering of new ideas and

vainly boastful of them. In appearance he was a tall, black-haired and very thick-set man, with European sideburns, a self-complacent, ruddy face, white teeth, and the bearing of a perfect gentleman. He was called a *clever* man. In certain societies this is what they call a particular breed of men who have waxed fat at the expense of mankind, who do nothing at all, who want to do nothing at all, and who because of their everlasting laziness and idleness have a lump of fat instead of a heart. And they are the ones who keep saying that there is nothing for them to do because of some very involved, hostile circumstances, which are "weighing down their spirit" and that is why they are a "melancholy sight." That's just a set, pompous saying they have, their *mot d'ordre*, their password and motto, a saying which these smug fatties scatter about them all the time, and which has long since begun to wear thin, being an outright affectation and an empty sound. However, some of these funny people who simply cannot find anything to do which, by the way, they have never tried to find, are indeed set on having everyone believe that it's not a lump of fat

they have instead of a heart but, rather the opposite, something *very deep*, so to say, but what it is exactly the most eminent of surgeons would not have said, out of sheer politeness of course. The way these gentlemen get on in life is by directing all their instincts and employing all their faculties in gross scoffing and the most short-sighted censuring, and in maintaining their attitude of immeasurable arrogance. Since they have nothing else to do but make notes of other people's faults and frailties, and since their fair-mindedness amounts to precisely as much as is meted out to an oyster, they are not hard put to it, armed with this means of self-protection, to live rather circumspectly in this world. They are exceedingly vainglorious about it. For instance, they are quite convinced that they are entitled to revenue from the whole world; the world to them is like that extra helping of oysters which they take in case they may want it later; they firmly believe that everyone else is a fool; that everyone is like an orange or a sponge which they can squeeze out now and again whenever they need the juice; that they own the world and that all this praiseworthy order of things

exists simply because they are such clever and strong-minded people. In their unlimited arrogance they admit of no shortcomings in themselves. They are not unlike those worldly rogues, born Tartuffes and Falstaffs, who have gone so far in their roguery that they have sincerely come to believe at last that this is the way it should be, that is, that they should live and cheat. They have so long been trying to convince others of their honesty, that finally they themselves have become convinced that they are indeed honest people, and that their very roguery is indeed the honest thing. You could never expect them to venture into conscientious judgement of themselves or honest self-appraisal; they are too bloated with fat for some things. In the foreground, in everything and always, is their own precious self, their Moloch and Baal, their magnificent ego. The world, the whole universe is nothing but a splendid mirror for them, created for the express purpose of allowing this little deity to admire himself in it uninterrupted, his own form blocking his view to everyone and everything; and consequently, it's small wonder that everything in the world looks so ugly to him. He has a

stock phrase for any occasion and a most fashionable phrase too, which is an exceptionally smart trick of these people. They are really the ones who promote a fashion, idly spreading abroad an idea which their scent tells them will become a success. They have this flair of scenting out one of those fashionable ideas and are the first to adopt it so that it may appear as if they were the ones to conceive it. Their main concern, however, is to provide themselves with a good stock of phrases suitable for the expression of their deep-felt regard for humanity, for the definition of what philanthropy is in its most correct and reasonably justified form, and, finally, to persecute romanticism unceasingly, or, more often than not, everything that is beautiful and genuine, every atom of which is worth their whole breed of slugs. And in their grossness they fail to recognize the truth in its indirect, transitional and unfinished form; they thrust aside anything that is not yet mature, that has not settled and is still fermenting. The well-fed man has been living a tipsy, carefree life, he has never done a thing himself, and does not know how difficult it is to accomplish anything; so be-

ware of offending his bloated feelings with some rudeness; he'll never forgive you for it, he will keep it, will always remember it, and will be delighted to wreak vengeance on you one day. The sum total of all this is that my hero resembled a colossal sack, no more no less, blown out to the full and stuffed with maxims, fashionable phrases, and labels of all sorts and types.

However, I must say that Mr. M. had some individuality too. He was a notable man: he was a wit, a talker, and a good story-teller, and in the drawing-rooms a circle of listeners invariably formed around him. He was particularly successful in creating an impression that evening. He took control of the conversation; he was in good form, gay and happy over something, and he did, indeed, become the centre of attraction. But all this time, Mme M. seemed listless and unwell; her face was so sad that I kept thinking that in a moment her recent tears would well up again and quiver on her long eyelashes. All this, as I have said, struck me and amazed me exceedingly. I left the room feeling strangely curious, and all night long I dreamed

of Mr. M., whereas previous to that I had seldom had nightmares.

Early next morning, I was called to a rehearsal of our tableaux in which I, too, had a part. The tableaux, the play and the ball, all on one evening, were to take place in a matter of five days or so, in honour of the birthday of our host's youngest daughter. Some hundred guests had been invited from Moscow and the neighbouring estates to attend, and as this was almost an impromptu affair, there was a great deal of worry, fuss, and fluster. The rehearsal, or rather the costume inspection, was fixed for an odd hour, in the morning, because our producer, the well-known artist R., a friend and guest, who out of friendship for our host had agreed to take upon himself the composition and production of the tableaux as well as our receipts, was in a hurry to start for town, there to shop for various stage properties and complete all the preparations generally, and therefore there was no time to lose. I was to take part in one of the tableaux with Mme M. It was called "The Mistress of the Castle and Her Page," and depicted a scene from the Middle Ages.

I felt strangely embarrassed when I met Mme M. at the rehearsal. I was afraid she would instantly read in my eyes all the thoughts, doubts, and surmises conceived in my mind the day before. Moreover, I kept fancying that in a way I was guilty towards her, because I had broken in upon her sorrow and had seen her tears, and that now she could not but regard me unfavourably as an uninvited and undesired partner in her secret. But everything went off quite smoothly, thank God; she simply took no notice of me. She seemed to have no mind for either me or the rehearsal; she was preoccupied, sad, and gloomily pensive; it was evident that some grave anxiety was worrying her. The rehearsal over, I ran upstairs to change, and ten minutes later I was on the verandah on my way into the garden. Mme M. came out through another door almost at the same time, and just then, coming towards us, her self-satisfied spouse appeared, on his way back from the garden whence he had escorted a whole group of ladies, leaving them there in the care of one of the dashing *cavaliers servants*. The meeting between husband and wife was obviously unexpected. Mme M. was

suddenly disconcerted for some unknown reason and there was a hint of annoyance in her impatient gesture. The husband, who had been light-heartedly whistling an aria and thoughtfully stroking and fluffing out his sideburns as he walked, frowned suddenly on seeing his wife, and looked her up and down with a stare that was truly inquisitorial, as I remember it now.

"Off to the garden?" he asked, noting the parasol and the book in his wife's hands.

"No, the grove," she answered, blushing faintly.

"Alone?"

"With him . . ." Mme M. said, with a nod at me. "I take my morning walks alone," she added in a voice that was somewhat shaky and indistinct, exactly the way one's voice sounds when one is uttering the first lie in one's life.

"Hm. . . . And I've just taken a whole party there. They are all meeting in the flower arbour to see Mr. N. off. He's leaving, you know . . . he has some trouble or something in Odessa. Your cousin (he meant the blonde lady) is laughing and almost crying all at once, you can't make her out at all. How-

ever, she told me you were angry with Mr. N. and that was why you would not go and see him off. It's nonsense, I trust?"

"She was joking," Mme M. replied as she walked down the verandah steps.

"So that is your daily *cavalier servant*?" asked Mr. M. looking at me through his lorgnette with a crooked smile.

"A page!" I cried, angry because of the lorgnette and the jeer, and, laughing straight into his face, I bounded down the stairs, taking three steps at a leap.

"Have a good walk," Mr. M. muttered, and went on his way.

Of course, the minute Mme M. had pointed me out to her husband I went up to her and tried to look as if I had been invited a whole hour before and that I had been accompanying her on her morning walks for the last month. But I simply could not understand why she was so upset and taken aback, and what her object was in having recourse to that white lie of hers? Why couldn't she simply say she was going alone? And now, I was afraid to meet her eyes; however, bewildered though I was, I could not help stealing naïve little looks into her face; but

just as it had been an hour before at the rehearsal, she took notice of neither my glances nor my unspoken questions. The same tormenting anxiety, but deeper and more pronounced, showed in her face, in her agitation, and in her walk. She was hurrying along, quickening her pace more and more, peering uneasily into every path, every clearing in the grove, or glancing back into the garden. And I, too, was expecting something to happen. Suddenly we heard a clatter of hoofs behind us. This was a whole cavalcade of ladies and gentlemen on horseback, who were seeing off that Mr. N. who was leaving our company so abruptly.

My blonde lady was among the amazons, too, the lady Mr. M. had meant when he told us of her tears. But, as usual, she was laughing like a child, riding her fine bay horse at a lively gallop. Mr. N. raised his hat when he came abreast of us, but he neither stopped nor said a word to Mme M. The whole crowd soon disappeared from view. I looked at Mme M. and almost cried out in amazement: she was deadly white, and large teardrops gathered in her eyes. Suddenly, our glances met; Mme M. blushed, turned away

for a moment, and there was an unmistakable flicker of vexation and uneasiness in her expression. I was intruding, more so than the day before, that was clear enough, but where could I go?

All at once, as if she had guessed the quandary I was in, Mme M. opened the book she was carrying and blushing, evidently trying to avoid looking at me, she said with feigned surprise:

"Oh dear! This is part two! I took it by mistake; please fetch me the first book, will you?"

What could be clearer? My part was over and I could not have been sent away in a more straightforward manner.

I ran away with her book and did not return. The first part remained untouched on my table all morning....

But I was quite upset; my heart was fluttering as though in constant fright. I did my best to avoid meeting Mme M. But Mr. M.'s smug countenance I watched with a wild sort of curiosity, as if it were sure to display something quite extraordinary now. I really fail to understand why I was so ridiculously curious then, all I remember is that everything I had witnessed that morning left me strangely be-

wildered. But my day had just begun, and it was to be abundantly eventful for me.

Dinner was served very early. All the guests were to take part in a pleasure outing that evening, a ride to the neighbouring village where a festival was being held, and therefore we had to have the time to get ready. I had been dreaming of this ride for three whole days, anticipating a world of pleasure. Almost everyone was gathered on the terrace for coffee. I stole in after the others and hid behind the triple row of chairs. My curiosity drew me on, and yet I didn't want Mme M. to catch sight of me. But it pleased chance to place me close to my blonde persecutor. A miracle had happened to her, something that was quite inconceivable: she had become twice as beautiful as she had been before! I don't know why it is or how, but miracles such as this do happen to women, and not infrequently too. There was a new guest among us at that time, a tall, pale-faced young man, our blonde lady's inveterate admirer, who had just arrived from Moscow for the express purpose, it seemed, of filling the place vacated by Mr. N., who was rumoured to be desperately in love with our

beautiful lady. As for the new arrival, he had for a long time been on exactly the same terms with her as Benedict was with Beatrice in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. To continue, our beautiful lady was at her extraordinary best that day. Her jokes and chatter were so graceful, so candid and naïve, and so excusably indiscreet; she was so gracefully presumptuous in that everyone should be delighted with her, that she really did make one and all feel an extraordinary admiration for her. A close circle of amazed and rapt listeners always surrounded her, and never before had she been so enchanting. Her every word was a seduction, a wonder, to be caught up and passed around; and not a single joke or witticism of hers was wasted. No one, it seemed, had ever known her to possess so much taste, brilliance, and cleverness. Ordinarily, all her best qualities were buried beneath the most self-willed whimsy, the most stubborn puerilities, almost bordering on buffoonery; one rarely noticed them, and if one did, one did not believe in them, and so her unusual success that evening was received with a passionate chorus of amazement.

However, this success was furthered by one peculiar and rather delicate circumstance, at least it was enhanced by the part it befell Mme M.'s husband to play in it. The lovely madcap decided (and it must be added: to everyone's delight, or at least to the delight of all the young people) to stage a violent attack on him, for reasons which were probably very important to her. She started a regular cross-fire of jokes, taunts, sarcastic remarks of the most irresistible and slippery kind, sarcasms of the most treacherous, perfectly secure and smooth type which never miss their mark and which provide no loopholes for a counter-attack, merely wearing out their victims with their hopeless struggles, and driving them to madness and the most amusing despair.

I do not know for certain, but I think that all this escapade was premeditated and not spontaneous. This desperate duel began as early as dinner-time that day. I say "desperate" because Mr. M. did not lay down arms soon. He had to collect all his presence of mind, all his quick-wittedness, all his rare resourcefulness so as not to be utterly defeated and turned to rout in absolute disgrace. All

those who took part in or witnessed the fray laughed heartily and incessantly throughout. Today did not resemble yesterday for him at any rate. Mme M. was seen to have made several attempts to restrain her imprudent friend, who for her part was set upon cloaking the jealous husband in the most ridiculous and clownish of guises, in the guise of "Blue Beard" I should imagine, judging by all the premises and by what I seem to remember, to say nothing of the part which I myself was destined to play in this misunderstanding.

It happened suddenly, in the most amusing way, quite unexpectedly, and unfortunately just when I was standing in full view, suspecting no evil intent and even forgetting my recent wariness. Suddenly I was thrust into the foreground as Mr. M.'s mortal enemy and natural rival, as being madly and desperately in love with his wife, to which my tormentor swore without a qualm, giving her word of honour and declaring she had proof of this, for only that afternoon, in the forest, she had seen....

But before she could finish, I broke in and interrupted her at a moment which was most

inopportune for me. That moment had been timed so cruelly, the trap laid so treacherously for the very end, for the clownish denouement, and was so immensely funny in its set up, that a regular outburst of general laughter, quite irrepressible, saluted this latest joke of hers. And though I guessed even then that it was not to my lot that the most unpleasant role had fallen, I nevertheless felt so embarrassed, annoyed and frightened, that overwhelmed with tears of anger and despair, choking with the shame of it, I tore my way through two rows of chairs, stepped forward and, turning to my tormentor, shouted in a voice breaking with sobs and indignation:

"Aren't you ashamed ... out loud too ... in front of all the ladies ... to say such a mean ... liel ! Just like a child ... in front of all the gentlemen ... what will they say?... And you, so big ... and married!..."

My speech was cut short, for deafening applause broke out. My sally created a proper *furore*. My naïve gesture, my tears and most of all the fact that I seemed to have spoken up in Mr. M.'s defence, provoked such infernal laughter, that even now, at the very recollection of it, I cannot help laughing too.

I was dumbfounded, almost insane with horror, and, burning with shame, I covered my face with my hands and shot out of the room, knocking a tray out of the hands of a footman I bumped into at the door. I rushed upstairs to my room, pulled out the key sticking on the outside, and locked myself in. That was a good thing because I was being pursued. In less than a minute a whole bevy of our prettiest ladies besieged my door. I could hear their ringing laughter, their rapid conversation, their shrill voices; they all twittered at once like swallows. All of them, every single one of them begged me, implored me to unlock my door if only for a moment; they swore they wouldn't do me the slightest bit of harm, all they wanted to do was smother me with kisses. But ... what could be more horrible than this new threat? I was burning with shame, I hid my face in my pillow, I did not open up, I did not even reply. They went on knocking and beseeching me for a long time, but I was deaf and unresponsive, just like an eleven-year-old.

Well, what was I to do now? All was revealed, all was disclosed, all that I had guarded and secreted so jealously.... Ever-

lasting shame and disgrace would fall upon my head! To tell the truth, I myself could not define what it was I was afraid of and what I wanted to conceal, but, after all, I was afraid of something, I was still trembling like a leaf lest that *something* should be disclosed. Neither did I know until that moment whether that something was good or bad, glorious or disgraceful, praiseworthy or not? And now, in my anguish and enforced loneliness, I learned that it was *ridiculous and shameful*! At the same time my instinct told me that a verdict such as this was faulty, inhuman, and harsh; but I was beaten, destroyed; the process of reasoning seemed to stop and become tangled in my mind; I could neither combat this verdict nor even consider it properly; I was dazed; all I was conscious of was that my heart had been wounded inhumanly and shamelessly, and impotent tears overwhelmed me. I was enraged; hatred and indignation, such as I had never known before, were seething within me, for this was the first real grief, insult, and injury that I had experienced in my life; there is no exaggeration whatsoever in all this, I really felt it all. A child's first, unformed, and inexperienced

feeling had been so ruthlessly tampered with, his first sweet and virginal modesty so early stripped and desecrated, his first and, perhaps, very deep aesthetic feeling besmirched. Those who made sport of me did not, of course, know or suspect much of what my suffering involved. A certain secret circumstance which I had not yet analyzed and was somehow afraid to analyze, was to a great extent responsible for my anguish. In sorrow and despair I remained lying on my bed, my face buried in the pillows, I was hot one minute, shivering the next. Two questions tormented me: what had the wretched blonde lady seen and what exactly could she have seen between Mme M. and me in the grove today? And the second one was: how, with what countenance, and in what possible manner could I look into Mme M.'s face now, and not perish that same minute and on the same spot from shame and despair?

At last an unusual noise in the courtyard roused me from the semi-coma I was in. I got up and went to the window. The whole yard was cluttered with carriages, saddle-horses and with servants bustling about. It looked as if everyone were leaving; a few riders

were already mounted; the other guests were taking their seats in the carriages.... And then I remembered the outing! And now, little by little, uneasiness began to seep into my heart; I peered into the yard trying to see my clipper, but it was not there, and that meant that I had been overlooked. I could not endure it and rushed downstairs, no longer thinking of unpleasant encounters or that recent disgrace of mine.

Thundering news awaited me: on this occasion there was neither a saddle-horse for me nor a seat in any of the carriages; everything had been taken, occupied, and I had no chance of going with the others.

Stunned by this new misfortune, I stood on the porch and gazed disconsolately at the long row of carriages, cabriolets and barouches in which there was not even the tiniest bit of room for me, and at the smart ladies sitting their impatiently prancing mounts.

One of the riders had tarried for some reason. Everyone was waiting for him in order to start off. His horse stood by the porch, champing the bit, pawing the ground, starting and rearing with fright. Two

grooms were holding it carefully by the bridle, while everyone else kept a wary and respectable distance.

Indeed, a most distressing thing had occurred which was preventing me from going. Apart from the fact that new guests had arrived and had taken all the seats and all the horses, two of the saddle-horses had fallen ill, and one of the two was my clipper. But it appeared that I was not the only one to suffer because of this circumstance: our new guest, that pale-faced young man I had already mentioned, had no horse to ride either. To save the situation, our host was obliged to resort to extreme measures, that is to recommend his wild, unbroken stallion, adding, in order to clear himself of any blame beforehand, that it should not be ridden under any circumstances and that it had long been decided to sell it because of its wild temper, if a buyer could be found for it, of course. But the forewarned young man declared that he was a decent rider, and that he was prepared to mount anything at all, so long as he could go. Our host said nothing then, but now I come to think of it there was an ambiguous and cunning smile lurking at the

corners of his mouth. While waiting for the rider who had boasted of his skill, our host stood by the horse, rubbing his hands in his impatience and throwing anxious glances at the door. Something akin to his feelings was transmitted to the two grooms, who held back the stallion and almost burst with pride because they stood there, in full view of the whole company, beside a horse like that, which might go and kill a man for no reason at all! Something not unlike their master's smile was reflected in their eyes, too, which were popping in anticipation and were also fastened on the door from which the visiting dare-devil was to appear. And then the horse, too, behaved as though it had reached an understanding with its master and grooms: its behaviour was so arrogant and conceited as if it were conscious of the scores of curious, watching eyes, and were flaunting its disgraceful reputation before everyone, in precisely the same manner in which an incorrigible rake takes pride in his criminal escapades. It seemed the horse was challenging any dare-devil who ventured to encroach upon its independence.

This dare-devil appeared at last. Sorry that

he had kept everyone waiting, he hurried down the steps without looking up, hastily pulling on his gloves, and he only raised his eyes when, stretching out his hand to grasp the waiting horse by the withers, he was startled at the sudden mad leap of the rearing horse and the warning shouts of the frightened company. The young man stepped back and looked in astonishment at the wild horse, which trembled like a leaf, snorted with rage and rolled its bloodshot eyes wildly, sank back on its hind legs and raised its front ones as if it were about to tear off and carry both the grooms away with it. For a minute or two the young man stood in utter bewilderment; then, reddening slightly for his moment of perplexity, he raised his eyes, glanced about him and looked at the frightened ladies.

"It's a very good horse," he uttered as though to himself, "and, by the look of it, it must be very pleasant to ride, but ... but d'you know, I'm not going to," he concluded, addressing our host with his wide, frank smile which so well became his kind and clever face.

"But I still consider you a splendid rider, I swear I do," replied the overjoyed master

of the unapproachable horse, giving his guest a warm and even a grateful handshake, "and for the very reason that you have at once realized what sort of a beast you are dealing with." He then added with dignity, "Would you believe it that I, who had served in the Hussars for twenty-three years, have thrice had the pleasure of lying on the ground, thanks to him, in other words, the exact number of times I have mounted this ... this good-for-nothing. No, Tankred my friend, there are no people of the right kidney for you here; evidently your rider is some Ilya Muromets, no less, who's sitting in his Karacharovo village, waiting until you lose all your teeth! Here, take him away! He's just frightening everyone! We shouldn't have led him out at all!" he concluded, rubbing his hands complacently.

It must be mentioned that Tankred was not the slightest bit of use to him, he wasn't worth his keep; moreover, the old Hussar had wrecked all his former glory of a remount officer through him by paying a fabulous sum for the useless drone whose only redeeming feature was his beauty perhaps.... But notwithstanding, he was delighted that

his Tankred had not lost his dignity and had disconcerted one more rider, thus reaping fresh and pointless laurels for himself.

"Oh! Aren't you coming?" cried the blonde lady, who particularly wanted her *cavalier servant* to be beside her on this occasion. "Can it be that you are afraid?"

"I am, honestly," replied the young man.

"Are you quite serious?"

"But do you really want me to break my neck?"

"Then hurry and change to my horse; don't be afraid, it's most docile, we won't be keeping anyone, they'll switch the saddles over at once! I'll try and ride yours, it cannot be that Tankred is always so discourteous!"

No sooner said than done! She jumped down from her saddle and was beside us before she had finished her sentence.

"Little you know Tankred if you imagine he'll allow himself to be saddled with your rotten saddle! And then I shan't let you go and break your neck; it really would be a pity, you know!" said our host, exaggerating as usual in this moment of inward satisfaction, his already exaggerated and studied sharpness

and even rudeness of speech which, he believed, were a commendation of a good soul and an old soldier, and should appeal to the ladies particularly. It was one of his fancies, his favourite hobby-horse, well known to us all.

"I say, cry-baby, wouldn't you like to have a try? You were so anxious to go, you know," said the courageous lady on noticing me there, and she teasingly indicated Tankred—prompted chiefly by her desire not to go away empty-handed since she had dismounted unnecessarily, and not to pass me by without a stinging little taunt, since I myself had blundered into her line of vision.

"I expect you're not like . . . oh well, it goes without saying that you're a well-known hero and would think cowardice shameful, especially now with people watching you, lovely page," she added with a rapid glance at Mme M., whose carriage stood nearest to the porch.

Hatred and a desire for revenge had flooded my heart when the beautiful amazon came up to us with the intention of mounting Tankred.... But I cannot describe what I felt at this unexpected and puerile challenge. Everything seemed to swim before my eyes when

I intercepted her look at Mme M. Instantly an idea flared up in my mind ... it was indeed an instant, less than an instant, it was like a flash of gunpowder, or perhaps my cup had overflowed and all my resurrected spirit revolted in me with such violence that suddenly I wanted to strike all my foes down dead and take revenge on them for everything and in front of everyone, thus showing them the sort of man I was; or perhaps, by some miracle, someone enlightened me in that instant in the history of the Middle Ages, which I knew not a word of till then, and a whirl of tournaments, paladins, heroes, fair ladies, glory and victors flitted through my spinning head, followed by the sound of heralds' trumpets, clashing swords, shouting, cheering crowds, and amid all these shouts one timid shout of a frightened heart, which is sweeter balm to a proud spirit than victory or glory. I do not know if all that foolishness had really occurred to me or, better said, a presentiment of that approaching and unavoidable foolishness, but all I do know is that I heard my hour strike. My heart turned over, faltered, and in one bound I jumped down from the porch and found myself beside Tankred.

"And you thought I'd be afraid?" I cried impudently and proudly, my vision dimming with my passion, breathless with excitement and blushing so that tears scorched my cheeks. "There, you'll see!" And, grasping Tankred by the withers, I put my foot into the stirrup before I could think, before the others could make the slightest move to hold me back; and in that instant, Tankred reared up, flung his head, with one mighty jump tore free from the dumbfounded grooms, and flew away like the wind. Everyone just gasped and screamed.

Heaven alone knows how I managed to swing my other leg over at this furious pace; neither do I understand how on earth I did not lose the reins. Tankred carried me out through the grillwork gate, turned sharply to the right, and tore away along the railings, not knowing where or how he was going. And only then did I hear behind me the shout raised by fifty voices, and this shout echoed in my tremulous heart with such a feeling of contentment and pride that I shall never forget that crazy moment of my childhood. All the blood rushed to my head, deafening and flooding me, and drowning my

fear. I was beside myself. And truly, as I remember it now, there really seemed to be something knightly in all this.

However, all my knightliness began and ended in less than a second, for if it hadn't the knight would have come to grief. And even so, I do not know what saved me. I could ride, of course, I had been taught, but my clipper was more like a lamb than a saddle-horse. Naturally, I would have tumbled from Tankred's back if he had only had the time to throw me; but having galloped some fifty yards, he suddenly took fright at a huge stone lying by the roadside, and shied backwards. He swerved in full flight with a turn so headlong and abrupt, that it puzzles me to this day why wasn't I bounced out of my saddle like a ball to some twenty feet away and been dashed to pieces, and how Tankred did not dislocate his shoulder from this sharp swerve? He tore back towards the gate, jerking his head furiously, glaring wildly to right and left, as if drunk with madness, flinging his legs up haphazardly, trying to shake me off with every leap as if it were a tiger that had jumped on to his back and plunged its claws and teeth into his flesh. An-

other moment and I would have been off, I was already falling; but now several riders came flying to my rescue. Two of them cut off the way into the open country; two others galloped so close they almost crushed my legs, as they hemmed Tankred in with their horses' flanks. They had the reins in their hands. A few moments later we were at the front porch.

I was pale and almost fainting when they took me down from my saddle. I was trembling all over like a blade of grass in the wind, and so was Tankred, who stood motionless, straining his whole body backwards as though digging his hoofs into the ground, his fiery breath coming laboriously from his red, steaming nostrils, quivering like a leaf and stunned, it seemed, by the insult and by his rage at the unpunished impudence of a child. All about me I heard exclamations of alarm, amazement and fright.

Just then my wandering gaze met that of Mme M., who was upset and pale, and—and I cannot forget that one moment—colour instantly suffused the whole of my face, it flamed up and burned like fire; I don't know what was happening to me but, embarrassed

and frightened by my own feelings, I shyly dropped my eyes. However, my look had been noticed, intercepted, and stolen from me. All eyes were turned to Mme M., who, caught unawares by this general interest, suddenly blushed like a child from some involuntary and naïve feeling, and forced herself to try and cover her blush with a laugh, quite unsuccessfully though, it must be said.

All this must have been a most amusing spectacle, of course; but suddenly a very silly and unexpected gesture saved me from being a laughing stock, and gave this whole adventure a peculiar tinge. The one who was to blame for all this commotion, the one who had until then been my irreconcilable enemy, my beautiful tormentor, suddenly rushed to me and began to kiss and hug me. She had not believed her own eyes when she saw me dare to accept her challenge and take up the gauntlet she had thrown me by glancing at Mme M. She had almost died with remorse and fright for me when I was flying astride Tankred; but now, when everything was over, and especially when she, together with the others, had caught the glance I gave Mme M., had seen my confusion and my

sudden blush, when her romantically inclined and frivolous mind had at last succeeded in placing a new, mysterious and unspoken interpretation on that one moment—now, after all this, my "knightliness" so enraptured her that she rushed to me and pressed me to her bosom—moved, delighted, and proud of me. A minute later she looked up at all the people crowding around us both, and they saw the most candid, the most stern of faces, with two little crystal-clear tear-drops quivering and gleaming in her eyes, and they heard her say in a serious and grave voice they had never heard her use before: "*Mais c'est très sérieux, messieurs, ne riez pas!*" nodding at me and indifferent to the fact that everyone was standing before her spellbound, lost in admiration of her rapturous delight. This spontaneous and quick impulse, this serious face, this simple-hearted naïveté, these never yet suspected heart-felt tears welling up in her ever laughing eyes, were a miracle so unexpected in her, that all stood before her as though electrified by her look, her quick fiery words and her gesture. It seemed no one could tear their eyes away from her, afraid to miss this rare play of feeling on her

inspired face. Even our host turned red like a tulip and it is said that he was afterwards heard to confess that "to his shame" he was in love with his beautiful guest for almost a whole minute after this. Well, needless to say, that after all that I was of course a knight and a hero.

"De l'Orge! Togenburg!" I heard about me.

Applause broke out.

"Good for the younger generation!" said our host.

"But he's coming with us, he must certainly come with us!" cried the beautiful lady. "We shall, we must find him a seat. He'll sit next to me, on my knees ... or no, no! I didn't mean it!..." she amended, laughing and unable to restrain her mirth as she remembered our first encounter. But though she laughed, she tenderly patted my hand and showered caresses on me, so I should not feel hurt.

"Of course! Of course!" several voices caught up. "He must come, he has won a seat for himself!"

The matter was solved in a minute. The old maid who had first introduced me to the blonde lady, was instantly overwhelmed with

requests by all the young people to remain behind and let me take her place in the carriage, to which she was obliged to agree, to her great disappointment, while she smiled and hissed quietly with rage. Her patroness, the lady she was always hovering around, my old enemy and new friend, called out to her, as she galloped away on her mettlesome horse laughing like a child, that she envied her and would have gladly stayed behind with her because it was going to rain anyway and we would all be soaked through.

Her prophecy of rain came true indeed. A regular downpour started an hour later, and our outing was ruined. We had to take shelter in the peasants' huts and remain there for several hours, and we could not start back for home until after nine, in the dampness that follows rain. I had the beginnings of a chill. Just as we were about to take our seats and start off, Mme M. came up to me and was surprised to find me wearing nothing warmer than a jacket with an open collar. I told her I had not had the time to fetch a raincoat. She pinned and fastened the frilled collar of my shirt higher up, then she took off a crimson gauze scarf she was wearing, and

wound it round my neck, so I should not get a sore throat. She was in such a hurry that I did not even manage to thank her.

When we got home, however, I went in search of her and found her in a small sitting-room, together with my blonde lady and the pale-faced young man who had that day achieved the renown of a good horseman by being afraid to mount Tankred. I went up to her to express my thanks and to return the scarf. But now, with all my adventures over, I seemed to be ashamed of something; I wanted to go upstairs as soon as possible and there, at leisure, think something over and puzzle it out. My mind was crammed with impressions. As I proffered the scarf I blushed all over, of course.

"I'd lay a wager he would have liked to keep the scarf," the young man said with a smile, "you can see it in his eyes that he's sorry to part with it!"

"That's it! That's just it!" the blonde lady put in. "Dear, oh dear!" she said, shaking her head in feigned annoyance, but she stopped because of a grave look from Mme M. who did not want the joke to be carried further.

I hurried away.

"Oh, you silly!" the blonde lady began as she caught up with me in the next room and took both my hands in a friendly clasp, "if you were so keen on keeping the scarf, you shouldn't have returned it at all! You could have said you had put it somewhere and that would have been the end of it. Oh you! Couldn't even do a thing like that! What a funny boy you are!"

And then she gave my chin a light flip of her finger, laughing because I turned red like a poppy.

"I am your friend now, you know—isn't it so? Is our enmity over? Eh? Yes or no?"

I laughed and pressed her fingers in silence.

"Well, mind it is now!... But why are you so pale and shivery? Have you caught a chill?"

"Yes, I'm unwell."

"Oh you poor dear! It's been too much of a day for you! D'you know what? Don't wait for supper, go to bed now, you'll be all right by morning. Come along!"

She took me upstairs and it seemed there would be no end to the fuss she made over

me. While I was taking off my clothes and getting into bed, she ran downstairs, got me some tea, and brought it up herself. She then went and fetched a warm blanket for me. I was quite amazed and moved by all her solicitude and care for me, or perhaps I was so affected by the events of that day, the outing and my chill, that when I bade her good-night, I hugged her warmly and tightly as if she were my sweetest and dearest friend, and then all my feelings swept over my enfeebled heart all at once, and I almost wept, clinging to her breast. She saw how impressionable I was and I believe my naughty friend herself was moved a little.

"You're a very good boy," she whispered, looking at me softly, "now please don't be angry with me, you won't be, eh?"

In short, we became the truest, the tenderest of friends.

It was rather early when I awoke, but the sun was already flooding my room with a brilliant light. I jumped out of bed feeling perfectly well and strong, with no trace of my chill and filled instead with an inexplicable gladness. I remembered what had happened the night before, and felt that I'd gladly give

up a whole fortune if only I could embrace my new friend, our beautiful blonde lady, this very minute again; but it was still very early and everyone was asleep. I dressed hurriedly, went down into the garden and thence into the wood. I made my way to where the growth was thickest, where the trees smelt strongest of resin, where the sun's rays peeped most gaily, rejoicing that here and there they had pierced the shady denseness of the leaves. The morning was beautiful.

I wandered on and on, and before I knew it I had reached the edge of the wood and had come out above the Moskva River. It was some two hundred yards away, below the hill. Men were mowing on the opposite bank of the river. Entranced, I watched the rows of sharp-edged scythes flash in the sun with one accord as the men swung, and then, streaking like little tongues of fire, vanish again—suddenly hiding; I watched the grass, cut at the roots, fall to right and left in rich piles and form into long, straight furrows. I do not know how long I stood thus lost in contemplation, but suddenly I was arrested by the sound of a horse snorting and stamping and pawing the ground impatiently some

twenty yards away from me, in a clearing running from the highroad to the manor house. I don't know if I only heard it just then when the rider came up and stopped, or if I had been hearing his approach for some time but the sounds had been tickling my hearing in vain, impotent to tear me away from my reverie. Curious, I turned back into the wood, and when I had made but a few steps I heard voices talking rapidly but softly. I went closer still, cautiously parted the branches of a bush edging the clearing, and instantly sprang back in amazement: a white dress I well knew flitted before my eyes, and a woman's soft voice echoed in my heart like a melody. It was Mme M. She was standing close to the rider, who was saying something hurriedly to her without dismounting from his horse, and to my surprise I saw it was Mr. N., the young man who had left the previous morning and whom Mr. M. had been so anxious to see off. But it was said at the time that he was going very far away, to the south of Russia somewhere, and therefore I was very much surprised to see him with us again so soon and alone with Mme M. She was eager and excited as

I had never before seen her, and tears were glistening on her cheeks. The young man was holding her hand, and he kissed it as he leaned down from his saddle. It was their minute of parting that I had come upon. They seemed to be in a hurry. At last he drew a sealed envelope from his pocket, gave it to Mme M., embraced her with one arm, leaning down from his saddle as before, and then he kissed her long and warmly. The next moment, he whipped his horse and flew past me like an arrow. Mme M. gazed after him for a few seconds, then she turned homewards, pensively and sadly. However, when she had gone a little way down the clearing she suddenly seemed to recollect her thoughts and, parting the bushes, she entered the wood.

I followed her, stirred and bewildered by all that I had witnessed. My heart was beating hard, as with fright. I felt dazed and benumbed; my thoughts were scattered and vague; all I recall is that something was making me dreadfully sad. I caught glimpses of her white dress through the bushes in front of me now and again. I followed her without thinking, keeping her in sight, but tremulous lest she should see me. At last she turned on

to a path that led towards the garden. I waited a moment or two and then I came out into the open as well; but great was my astonishment when suddenly I saw the sealed envelope, which I recognized at once, lying on the reddish sand, the envelope which but ten minutes before had been given to Mme M.

I picked it up: it was a white envelope, without a word written on it, it was not large but bulky and heavy, as if there were two or three sheets of notepaper in it.

What was in this envelope? No doubt it held the key to all this mystery. Perhaps in it was said all that Mr. N. feared would be left unsaid at that hurried and fleeting rendezvous? He had not even dismounted. Was he pressed for time, or was he afraid, perhaps, of betraying himself in that moment of parting.... God alone knows.

I paused among the trees and threw the envelope into the very middle of the path, keeping my eyes fixed on it meanwhile, thinking that Mme M., discovering her loss, would retrace her steps to look for it. After some four minutes of waiting, I could contain myself no longer and, picking up the envelope

again, I put it in my pocket and ran after Mme M. I only caught up with her in the garden; she was walking straight towards the house along the main avenue, lost in thought with eyes downcast, although her steps were swift and hurried. I did not know how I was to act. Should I go up to her and give her the envelope? But that would mean that I knew everything, that I had seen everything, I would have betrayed myself with the first word I uttered. And how was I to look at her now? How would she look at me? I kept hoping that she would remember, would miss the envelope and retrace her steps. In that case I could have dropped the envelope on the path, and she would have found it. But no! We were close to the house now; she had already been seen.

As ill luck would have it, almost everyone was up very early that morning, for it had been decided the previous night, after the unsuccessful outing, to make another start that day, which I knew nothing about. Everyone was on the terrace having breakfast, ready to set out. I waited for ten minutes or so to avoid being seen with Mme M. and, taking a roundabout way through the gar-

den, approached the house from the opposite direction, much later than Mme M. She was walking up and down the terrace, looking pale and upset, her arms folded, and it was obvious that she was making a valiant effort to master her tormenting, desperate anguish, which could be read in her eyes, her pacing, and her every movement. Once or twice she went down the terrace steps and started towards the garden, and all the while her eyes searched impatiently, hungrily, and even indiscreetly for something on the terrace floor and between the flower beds. There was no doubt about it: she had discovered her loss and was evidently afraid she had dropped the envelope here somewhere, close to the house—yes, that was it, and she knew it!

Someone remarked that she was looking pale and upset, and then the others noticed it too. A regular volley of questions and exclamations followed; she had to put them off with a joke, to laugh, and to appear light-hearted. Now and again she threw a glance at her husband, who was engaged in conversation with two ladies at the other end of the terrace, and then the same tremulous-

ness and embarrassment seized her as on the first night of his arrival. I stood apart from everyone, my hand thrust into my pocket, clutching the envelope, and I prayed to God that Mme M. would take notice of me. I wanted to give her heart, to calm her fears if only with a look, or to say something to her covertly and quickly. But when she did happen to look at me, I started and dropped my eyes.

I saw her anguish and I had not misunderstood its cause. I do not know her secret to this day. I know nothing but what I myself had witnessed and what I am telling now. Perhaps this affair was not what it could have been supposed at a mere glance. Perhaps that kiss had been a parting one, perhaps it was the poor and crowning reward for all that had been sacrificed to her good name and her peace of mind. Mr. N. was going away; perhaps he was leaving her for ever. And then the letter itself, which I was clutching in my hand—who knows what it said? How judge her and who should be the judges? And yet there was no doubt at all, that the sudden disclosure of this secret would have dealt a frightening, shattering blow to her life. My memory still retains her face:

one could not have suffered more. To feel, to know, to be certain, that in a quarter of an hour's time, or in a minute, everything might be disclosed, to wait for it as one condemned to death waits for the hour of execution; someone might have found the envelope and picked it up; there was no name on it, it might have been ripped open, and then ... what then? Was there a means of execution more horrible than that awaiting her? She was moving among those who would sit in judgement over her. Their flatteringly smiling faces would in a minute turn grim and inexorable. She would read mockery, malice, and icy disdain in these faces, and then night, eternal and dawnless, would descend upon her world. But no, I could not have then understood all this the way I am thinking of it now. All I felt then were my suspicions and my misgivings, and a pain in my heart because of the danger threatening her, which I did not even quite understand. But whatever her secret involved, much of it was atoned for, if there was anything that needed atonement, by those grief-laden moments of which I was a witness and which I shall never forget.

But now a cheerful voice was heard sum-

moning everyone to get started; a happy bustle ensued; everyone broke into talk and merry laughter. In a minute or two the terrace was deserted. Mme M. excused herself from going, admitting at last that she was unwell. But, thank goodness, everyone was leaving, everyone was hurrying away and they had no time to pester her with their sympathy, their questions, and their advice. Only a few of the guests remained at home. Her husband said something to her; she replied that she would be well by evening, that he need not be anxious, that she felt no need to lie down, that she would go into the garden, alone ... with me.... And, saying this, she looked at me. What could be more opportune! I flushed with happiness! In a minute we were on our way.

She was following the same alleys, walks, and paths she had come through earlier that morning on her way from the wood, her instinct prompting her to pick out the same way. She stared fixedly before her, her eyes fastened on the ground, searching it; she ignored my questions and perhaps she forgot that I was walking with her.

But when we finally reached the spot where

I had picked up the envelope and where the path came to an end, Mme M. suddenly stopped and said in a feeble, stricken voice, that she was feeling worse and would return home. When she got to the grille of the garden wall, she stopped again and stood thinking a moment. A smile of desperation twitched her lips and then, exhausted, wearied, with reckless resolution and submitting to her fate, she started towards the wood again, this time quite forgetful of my presence.

My heart was wrung with anguish, and yet I did not know what to do.

We went on, or rather I led her on to the spot where an hour ago I had heard the stamping of his horse and had listened to their conversation. Here, close to an old elm-tree, there was a seat, cut in solid rock, with ivy twining round it and wild jasmine and sweet-brier growing at the foot. There were little bridges, arbours, grottos and other such surprises scattered all over the small wood. Mme M. sat down and glanced vacantly at the wonderful view spreading before us. Then she opened her book and fixed her motionless gaze upon it, she neither read nor turned the pages, hardly knowing what

she was doing. It was already half past nine. The sun was high in the sky, floating majestically in the fathomless blue above us, melting, it seemed, in its own fire. The haymakers had moved further on; they were barely visible from our side of the river. Endless furrows of cut grass were trailing close at their heels, and its warm fragrance came wafting to us on the barely stirring breeze. The creatures that "neither reap nor sow" but are as wilful as the air they cleave with their wings, were loud in a never-ending chorus all about us. It seemed that each flower, the poorest little blade of grass, was offering its sacrificial perfume to the One who had created it, saying, "Father! I am blessed and happy!..."

I glanced at the poor woman who alone seemed dead in this world seething with joyous life; two large tear-drops, which the searing pain had forced from her heart, hung motionless on her eyelashes. I had the power to bring life and happiness to this poor, sinking heart, but I did not know how to begin, how to make the first move. I was in torment. A hundred times I tried to approach her, and every time a strange feeling I could

not master nailed me to the spot, and every time my face flamed like fire.

Suddenly a happy thought dawned on me: the means was found; I felt restored to life.

"Would you like me to pick you a bouquet of flowers?" I offered in a voice so joyful that Mme M. raised her head at once and looked at me closely.

"Do," she said at last, very faintly, with the smallest of smiles, and instantly looked down at the page again.

"They may cut the grass here too, you know, and there won't be any flowers left!" I cried gaily as I started on my way.

Soon I had my bouquet ready—small and plain. I would have been ashamed to bring it into a room, but how merrily my heart beat while I was picking the flowers and tying the bouquet together. The sweet-brier and wild jasmine I picked before I set out. I knew there was a field of ripening rye near by, and I ran there for some cornflowers. I selected the most golden and fat ears of rye and put them between the flowers. Close by I chanced upon a whole nest of forget-me-nots, and my bouquet was beginning to grow. Further away in the field I found some deep blue campanulas

and wild carnations, and then I ran down to the river to pick some yellow water-lilies. And then, as I went into the wood for a minute on my way back, to see if I couldn't get a few bright green, lobed maple leaves to surround the bouquet, I suddenly stumbled upon a whole family of pansies, their violet perfume luckily leading me to the discovery of the flowers still sprinkled with bright drops of dew and hiding in the thick, lush grass. My bouquet was ready. I wove some long blades of grass into a thin rope and tied it round the bouquet, and then I carefully placed the envelope among the flowers, but in such a way that it could be very easily seen if my gift were granted the slightest bit of attention.

I took it to Mme M.

It occurred to me, on the way, that the letter was much too evident, and so I covered it with the flowers. As I came closer I pushed it deeper into the bouquet and then, when I had almost reached Mme M., I suddenly thrust it so far down that nothing remained to be seen of it at all. My cheeks were blazing. I wanted to hide my face in my hands and run away at once, but the look she gave my flowers said that she had quite forgotten that I had

gone to pick them for her. With hardly a glance, she stretched out her hand mechanically, and, taking my gift, she put it on the bench beside her, as if that was what I gave it to her for, and fixed her eyes on her book again, as in a daze. I was ready to weep with disappointment. "I only hope my bouquet remains beside her," I was thinking, "I only hope she doesn't forget about it." I lay down in the grass a little distance away, pillowed my head in my arm, and closed my eyes, pretending to be overcome with sleep. But I kept watching her and waiting.

This went on for about ten minutes; I fancied she was growing paler and paler. Suddenly, blessed chance came to my rescue.

This was a large golden bee, brought by the gentle and kind breeze to help me. It buzzed over my head first, and then it flew towards Mme M. Twice she tried to chase it away with a wave of her hand, but the bee seemed bent on becoming more and more tiresome. At last Mme M. snatched up my bouquet and waved it in front of her face. In the same second, the envelope broke free of the flowers and fell straight into her open book. I started. For a few moments Mme M., mute with amazement,

looked first at the envelope and then at the flowers she was holding in her hands, and she could not trust her own eyes, it seemed.... Suddenly she blushed, started, and glanced at me. But I forestalled her look and shut my eyes tight, pretending I was fast asleep; nothing in the world would have made me look straight into her face just then. My heart fluttered and sank as though it were a little bird which had been caught in the clutches of a tousle-haired village boy. I cannot say how long I lay thus with my eyes closed: two of three minutes I should say. At last I ventured to open them. Mme M. was reading the letter hungrily, and I could tell by her flaming cheeks, her sparkling, tearful eyes, and her blissful face in which every line was aglow with a joyful awareness, that this letter held happiness for her and that her anguish, all of it, was now dispersed like smoke. My heart was imbued with a poignant sweetness, it was an effort to pretend.

Never shall I forget that moment!

Suddenly voices came calling, from quite a distance away:

"Mme M.! Natalie! Natalie!"

The voices of two women. One I knew well: it belonged to my blonde friend; the other I did not know.

Mme M. did not call back, but she quickly left her seat, came up to me, and bent over me. I could feel her looking straight into my face. My eyelashes quivered, but I controlled myself and did not open my eyes. I tried to make my breathing more even and tranquil, but my heart was smothering me with its turbulent beating. Her hot breath scorched my cheek; she bent very, very close to my face, as if to make sure. And then a kiss and a teardrop fell on my hand—the hand that lay across my breast. And twice she kissed it.

"Nataliel Nataliel Where are you?" the voices sounded again but very close to us now.

"Coming!" Mme M. replied in her rich, silvery voice, which was muffled and trembling with tears now, and so softly that I alone could have heard her. "I'm coming!"

But at last my heart betrayed me and, emptying itself of blood, sent it all up into my face. In the same moment, a quick, hot kiss scorched my lips. I cried out weakly and opened my eyes, but her gauze scarf fell upon my face right then—it was as if she wanted

to protect me from the sun with it. The next moment she was gone. All I could hear was the gentle patter of her hurriedly vanishing footsteps. I was alone.

I tore the scarf off my face and kissed it, beside myself with rapture; for a while I was like one demented! Gasping for breath, I lay in the grass propped on my arms, staring before me vacantly and fixedly at the hills patched with cornfields, at the river flowing its intricate course around them and winding, as far as the eye could see, between more hills and villages which one caught glimpses of like dots over the whole sunlit landscape, at the blue, barely visible forest, smoking, it seemed, on the edge of the burning skies, and little by little a sweet calmness, inspired by the solemn tranquillity of the view, brought peace to my turbulent spirit. I felt better and breathed more freely. But my soul was suffering sweet and subdued torment, as though through insight into something, or with a foreboding of something. My frightened heart, fluttering softly in anticipation, was beginning to understand something, timidly and happily. And all at once my bosom heaved and ached as if something had pierced it, and tears, sweet

tears, burst from my eyes. I covered my face with my hands and, quivering like an aspen leaf, I surrendered myself unrestrainedly to this first revelation and acknowledgement of my feelings, to this first, as yet obscure, insight into my inner self.... That moment marked the end of my childhood....

When, two hours later, I arrived at the house, I found Mme M. no longer there: owing to some unforeseen circumstances, she had left for Moscow with her husband. I never met her again.

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Ф. М. ДОСТОЕВСКИЙ

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